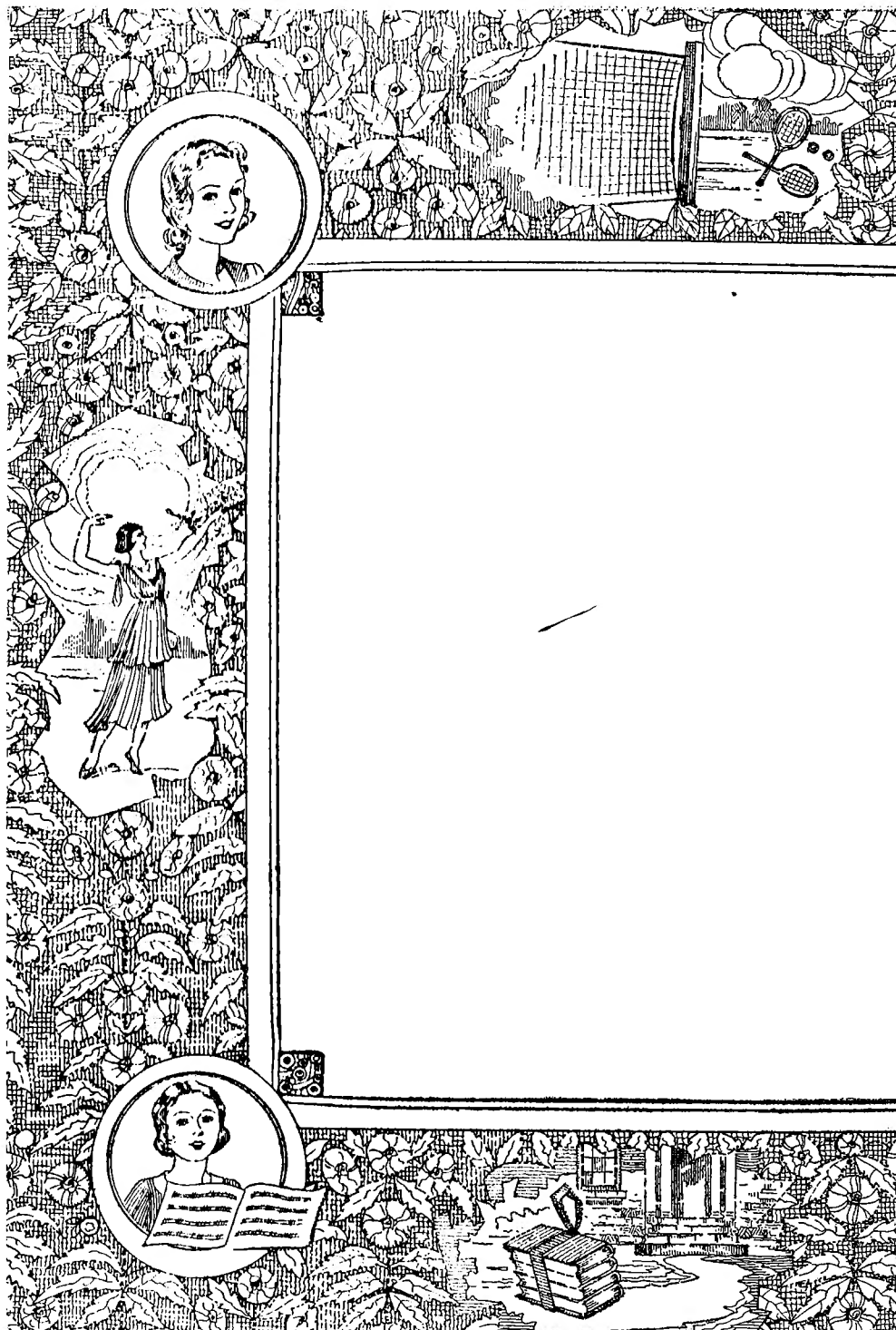
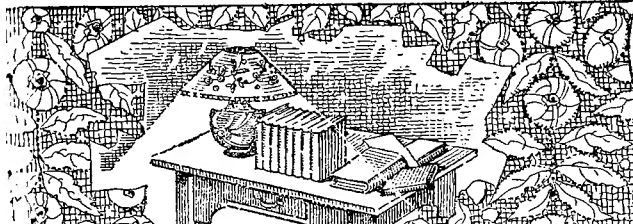
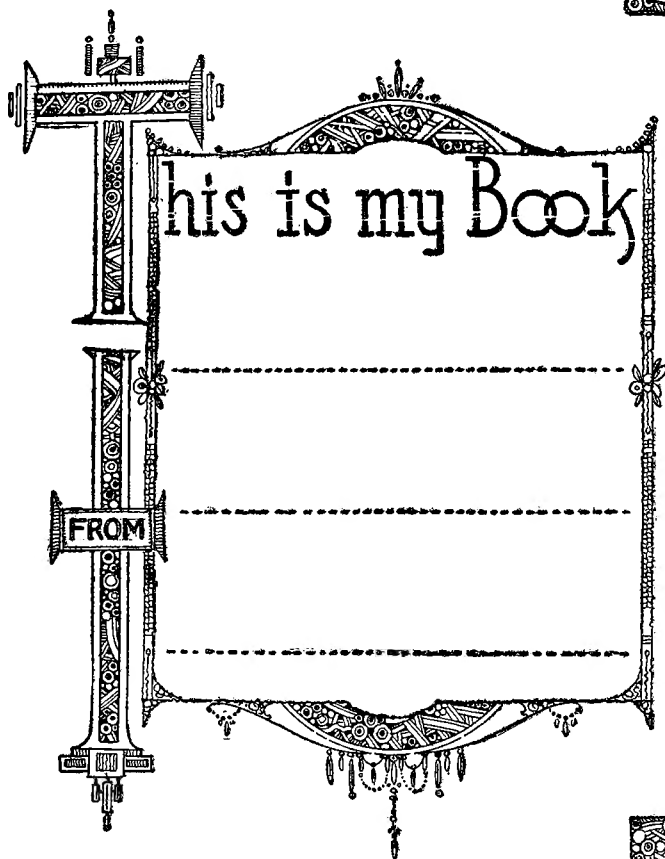
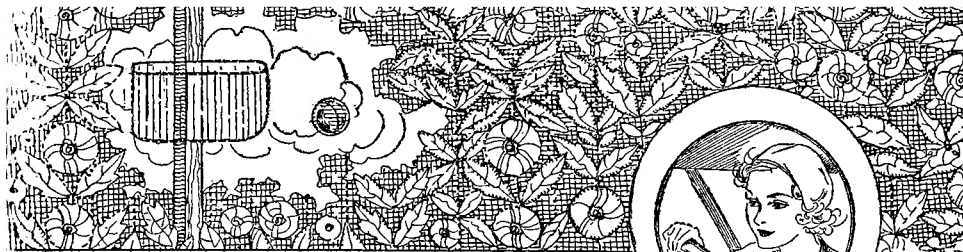
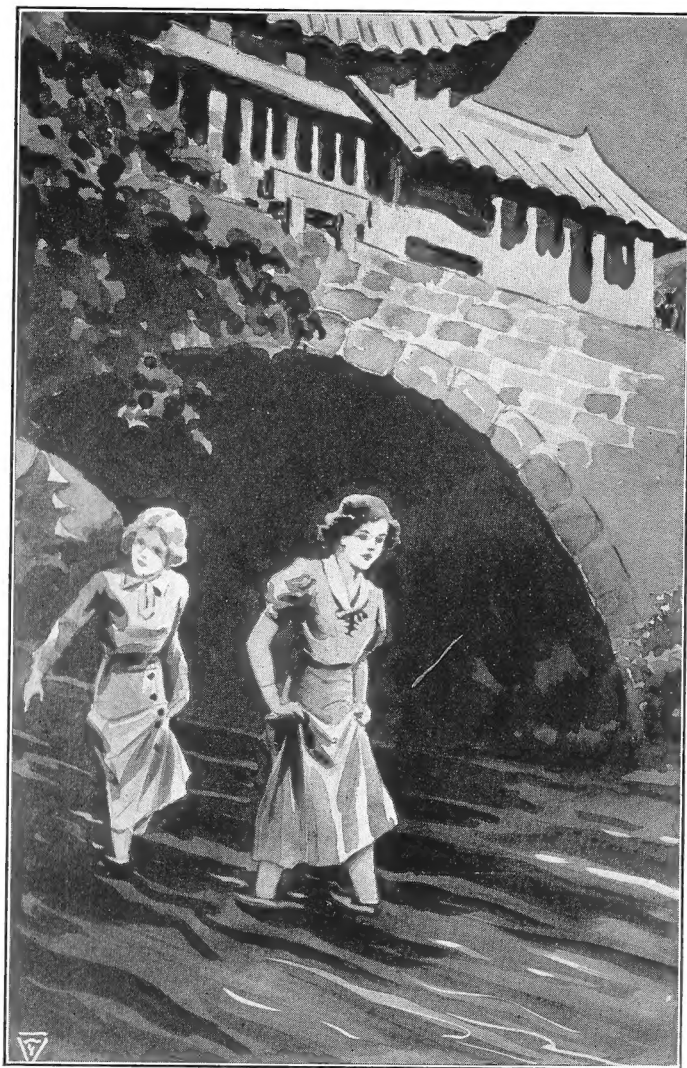


THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

MILDRED A. WIRT







SALLY CROSSED THE LAKE WITH THELMA PRESSING
DIRECTLY IN HER WAKE.

"Through the Moon-Gate Door"

(See page 194)

Through the Moon-Gate Door

By
MILDRED A. WIRT

Author of
THE TWIN RING MYSTERY
THE CLUE AT CROOKED LANE
THE HOLLOW WALL MYSTERY
THE SHADOW STONE
THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY

ILLUSTRATED



CUPPLES AND LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

MILDRED A. WIRT MYSTERY STORIES

Large 12 mo. cloth illustrated

THE CLUE AT CROOKED LANE
THE HOLLOW WALL MYSTERY
THE SHADOW STONE
THE WOODEN SHOE MYSTERY
THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

Other titles in preparation

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THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

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THROUGH THE MOON-GATE DOOR

CHAPTER I

THE PINK DOORWAY

"I REALLY don't see why I promised to go with you," complained Thelma goodnaturedly. "You're always getting me to do the most outlandish things, Sally."

"Oh, it will be fun to visit Mr. Chan's Oriental Shop," replied her companion, a tall dark girl in red plaid. "You're just afraid some Chinese hatchetman will spring at you from a dark alley!"

"I am not!" retorted Thelma indignantly. "I guess I've lived in San Francisco long enough to know that Chinatown is as safe as any other part of the city—almost anyway. But I can't see much sense in visiting an expensive establishment like Mr. Chan's when we haven't more than a dollar between us."

"Yes, being broke is a drawback at an auction sale," Sally admitted with a sigh. "But I thought it would be interesting to see all the lovely Chinese art objects. They say Mr. Chan is one of the most influential men in Chinatown and some of his antiques are priceless."

"I've heard that he is a reliable merchant."

"It won't cost us anything to watch the sale. The

crowd will be so large that no one will notice us."

"I hope you're right," Thelma said uneasily as the two girls paused at a corner to wait for their street-car.

A year younger than Sally Brandon who was fifteen, shy Thelma French lacked her companion's confidence and initiative. She became embarrassed rather easily and only in the presence of those who knew her intimately did she appear at her best.

Sally and Thelma long had been friends. Their homes stood side by side on a quiet street close to the bay, they attended the same school, they shared many happy recollections of childhood picnics spent at Golden Gate park and at the quayside.

The girls were in perfect accord, yet always it was Sally who thought up new and entertaining things to do. Upon this particular day, she had read a newspaper item announcing an auction sale to be held at Mr. Chan's Shop, and from her own family servant, Lin, had learned that she and Thelma would be received with courtesy at the Chinese establishment whether or not they made a purchase.

Thelma and Sally boarded the street car, leaving it a little farther on as they approached the Chinese quarter. Once they had passed beyond the California street line they found themselves in a district teeming with life and color.

There were dwellings and shops, many of the latter with pagoda-like roofs and balconies, windows decorated with queer Chinese signs, and lavish displays of Canton vases, teakwood tables, embroidered robes, ebony screens. The streets were thronged with slant-eyed men who walked with a shuffling gait, yet no one paid the slightest attention to Sally and Thelma.

The girls made their way past a group of colorful bazaars and came at last to one more imposing than its neighbors, an establishment characterized by iron balconies and a painted pink doorway. Just above the arching portal, a sign proclaimed that it was the shop of Mr. Chan.

"Oh, let's not go inside," Thelma said with a shiver, suddenly losing her courage. "We can see everything from here."

She clung to Sally's hand, drawing her toward the shop window. It was not crowded with miscellaneous articles but displayed only one object, a carved jade figure reposing on a black velvet cushion.

"We can't see anything unless we go inside," Sally complained.

As she stared uncertainly at the formidable doorway, a well-dressed man and woman came down the street, and without the slightest hesitation, entered the establishment.

"Oh, come on, Thelma," Sally said carelessly, her

confidence restored. "Everyone is going in—and so are we!"

A tiny bell jingled musically as the girls opened the door, but they felt instantly reassured as they stepped into a room faintly fragrant with the odor of incense. The establishment was thronged with men and women of their own race, and the few Chinese clerks who moved about behind the counters spoke perfect English and were immaculately dressed.

Thelma and Sally attracted no attention as they roved about the great room, admiring trays of jade ornaments, carved bronze bowls, ivory screens, translucent porcelains, antique vases and sculptured stones.

"Did you ever see such a gorgeous display?" Thelma murmured wistfully. "I wish now I hadn't spent my weekly allowance."

"It wouldn't go far here if you had saved it," Sally rejoined. She plucked at her companion's sleeve. "Thelma, look over to your right. Isn't that Li-la Wing?"

Thelma turned to stare at a girl who, although she wore modish American clothes, obviously was a Chinese. She stood somewhat apart from the crowd, gazing at an object in a show case.

"Why, it *is* Li-la!" Thelma exclaimed. "She was in our class at school two years ago. Only for some reason she dropped out."

"Let's go over and talk with her."

Li-la Wing did not observe the girls as they drew near, but when Sally spoke her name, she suddenly turned. An expression which was akin to fear, changed to a warm smile as she recognized her former schoolmates.

"Thelma! Sally! I am very glad to see you again."

"We've missed you at school," Sally said in her forthright way. "Why did you drop out just as we were becoming nicely acquainted?"

The question appeared embarrassing to Li-la. Her gaze shifted and she laughed nervously.

"The choice was not mine. My uncle wished for me to have private tutoring."

"Oh, well, I suppose it is nicer," Thelma remarked, "but one misses a lot of fun. Where are you living now, Li-la?"

"At my uncle's home, Moon Gate, along the shore drive," the Chinese girl replied. She hesitated before adding: "I should feel honored to have you call."

"Why, thank you," Sally answered warmly. "We'd love to come at any time."

She half expected that Li-la would mention a definite day for the visit, but the Chinese girl seemed to have voiced the invitation casually with little thought that it would be accepted other than as a polite utterance. She turned her attention once more upon a curious object in one of the glass show cases.

"What a queer figure!" Sally commented, following Li-la's gaze. "Is it an idol?"

"A Buddha," Li-la answered, hiding a smile. "This particular one is of solid gold, set with precious gems.

"It must be worth a great deal of money," Thelma murmured in awe.

"I am surprised to see it here so openly displayed," Li-la returned.

An elderly Chinese gentleman in a plum colored robe moved with soft cat-like tread toward the girls. His gaze traveled first to Li-la Wing and then to the golden Buddha.

He next turned upon a clerk who hovered nearby, berating him in Chinese. Then he jerked open the door of the glass case, and removing the Buddha thrust it beneath his robe and entered a private room.

"He seemed to be angry about something," Thelma murmured.

"What did he say?" Sally asked Li-la curiously.

The Chinese girl shrugged. "The esteemed Mr. Chan reprimanded his clerk for displaying the Buddha when it is not for sale."

"I can't see any reason for getting so excited about it," Thelma said. "Maybe he thought we intended to steal it."

"Yes, that is probably what Mr. Chan thought," Li-la rejoined evenly.

Sally and Thelma glanced quickly at the girl but

her face was impassive. She seemed to have lost all interest in the Buddha and began to examine objects in another case. However, Sally observed that wherever they went in the room, they were slyly watched by the Chinese clerk.

"Did you say that the gentleman in the embroidered robe was Mr. Chan?" Sally presently inquired of Li-la.

"Yes, Mr. Chan is the owner of this shop and an influential man in the Six Companies."

"I've often heard of the Six Companies," Thelma said, "but I never knew what it meant."

"It is a tribunal," Li-la explained. "One might call it the ruling commercial organization of Chinatown."

"I have seen the building on Stockton Street," Sally remarked. "Do you know Mr. Chan well, Li-la?"

"Everyone knows Mr. Chan," Li-la responded vaguely.

She seemed to have grown weary of the conversation and to further questions replied briefly. Sensing the change in Li-la's attitude, Sally and Thelma sought an excuse to leave her.

"I think the auction is about to begin," Sally declared. "At least the crowd is going toward the rear of the shop."

"The sale is to be held in a back room," Li-la said, indicating a door to the right. "I wish to look at a few more of Mr. Chan's treasures before I join you."

Sally and Thelma nodded goodbye and, passing through the doorway found themselves in a long, dark hall.

"Which way do we go?" Thelma asked in bewilderment, for there were several doors opening off the corridor. "I wish we hadn't come!"

"Now don't start getting jittery," Sally commanded. "The sale probably has started and that's why the door is closed."

"Let's go back and get Li-la. She'll know the way."

"No, I hear voices at the end of the hall," Sally declared. "The door is partly ajar too so that must be the auction room."

She pulled the unwilling Thelma down the hall with her. At the door the girls paused, and Sally, after a brief hesitation, cautiously pushed it open.

Instantly she saw that she had made a mistake. The door opened not into the auction chamber, but into a private office. Mr. Chan, his back turned, conversed with another Chinese gentleman. On the desk in front of the two men reposed the ugly golden Buddha.

Unaware that anyone had opened the door, Mr. Chan picked up the figure. He said something to his companion, and the man leaned forward expectantly, his eyes fastened on the Buddha.

Sally and Thelma could not retreat. They seemed hypnotized by the little figure of gold which Mr.

Chan caressed in his slender, tapering fingers. A smile of pleasure passed over his face as he slowly turned the Buddha in his hand. Then he removed a small plug from the base, and drew forth a tiny silk bag. Carefully he untied the string, and lifted out a large green emerald!

CHAPTER II

MR. CHAN'S EMERALD

SALLY and Thelma had witnessed a sight never intended for their eyes. Amazement gave way to panic, and they hastily retreated, but not before the Chinese gentleman who sat opposite Mr. Chan had observed them.

"I—I beg your pardon," Sally stammered, backing out through the door. "We were looking for the auction room."

Mr. Chan slowly turned his head to regard the embarrassed girls with an intent scrutiny. He was a man of small stature; his almond shaped eyes were both cunning and wise; his wrinkled yellow face seemed ageless. As the girls made these observations they noted another fact—the green emerald had vanished. They had not seen it disappear, yet they felt certain it must have gone somewhere into the ample folds of Mr. Chan's silk sleeve.

If the owner of the Oriental Shop realized that the girls had seen the gem, his expression did not disclose it.

"The auction room is the one to your left," he said politely in perfect English.

Thelma and Sally fled in panic down the hall. For some reason which they could not fully understand, they felt frightened. Their only thought was to escape from the establishment as quickly as possible, and they had no intention of searching further for the elusive auction room.

In their excitement, the girls failed to observe an approaching figure in the dark corridor, and were brought up short when they ran directly into Li-la Wing.

"Hello," she said in her musical, high-pitched voice. "Why do you hurry?"

Without stopping to consider the importance of their revelation, Sally and Thelma told of the mistake they had made in entering Mr. Chan's office.

"It was dreadfully embarrassing," Sally declared, "and I'm afraid Mr. Chan may have thought we opened the door deliberately."

"Li-la, we saw him take a green stone from the hollow interior of the Buddha," Thelma reported in an awed tone. "It looked almost as large as a quarter and we thought it might be a genuine emerald!"

"That's probably why Mr. Chan acted as he did about having the figure removed from the show case," Sally added. "He knew what was hidden inside of it."

The girls had given a complete account of their little adventure, when it suddenly dawned upon them that while Li-la had listened intently to their story, she had not spoken a word.

"Li-la, do you suppose the gem was an emerald?" Sally inquired, feeling that perhaps she and Thelma had not been wise in revealing so much.

"You may have seen the Ning-Wo emerald," the Chinese girl responded. "Did Mr. Chan replace the gem inside the Buddha?"

"We didn't wait long enough to see," Thelma answered with a nervous laugh. "Why do you imagine Mr. Chan kept the emerald hidden in such a queer place?"

"Why does any man hide his treasure?" Li-la asked with a slight shrug. After a brief silence she added gravely: "You will speak to no one of the gem if you are wise."

Sally glanced quickly toward her. Although Li-la's doll-like face was devoid of expression, the dark eyes seemed to convey a message of warning. Did the girl have special knowledge of Mr. Chan's emerald? Sally sensed that she and Thelma had stumbled upon something secret and sinister whose roots extended deep into the life of Chinatown.

Sally could not bring herself to ask Li-la the significance of the Ning-Wo emerald. Quite suddenly she had lost all desire to attend the auction, and she was

anxious to get as far away from Mr. Chan's establishment as possible.

Li-la seemed to read the thought, for with a disarming smile, she said:

"Come, I will show you the way to the auction room so that you will have no more trouble."

She linked arms with the girls and led them on down the corridor. Li-la opened a door and they entered a large room which was crowded with people. Men and women were laughing and talking as they waited for the auctioneer to start the sale. Sally and Thelma immediately felt at ease, and their fears of a moment before seemed ridiculous. How silly of them to have considered flight! After all Mr. Chan was a reputable Chinese merchant and they were as safe in his establishment as in any shop of San Francisco.

Guided by Li-la, the girls wandered about the display room, examining the many fine articles which were to be sold. Presently Sally looked up from admiring a handsome inlaid table, and was astonished to discover that Li-la no longer stood beside her.

"Where did she go?" Sally asked Thelma in bewilderment.

"She must have vanished into thin air. She was here just a moment ago."

They looked carefully about the room but the Chinese girl was nowhere to be seen.

"It's funny she'd just walk off without saying a

word," Thelma declared. "Li-la is nice but she's queer."

"Yes, she is. I'm just as glad she's gone, for somehow I feel uneasy in her presence. I keep thinking she is reading my thoughts."

"So do I," Thelma admitted. "And when we were telling her about Mr. Chan's emerald, she acted so strangely—almost as if she knew all about it before."

"There must be a story of some sort connected with that gem," Sally said in an undertone. "Why does Mr. Chan keep it hidden in the Buddha? Li-la's answer didn't satisfy me at all."

The sale was about to start so the girls sought chairs toward the rear of the room. Before they could seat themselves, a Chinese clerk approached and bowed politely.

"Missee Brandon?"

"Why, yes," Sally stammered, wondering how her name could be known.

"You will please follow me," the clerk instructed. "Your friend also."

Sally and Thelma exchanged a startled glance. Although the man's request had been made in a casual, polite tone, their former feeling of fear and dread returned. They did not wish to obey, yet they found themselves following the clerk into the dimly lighted hall.

"Did Li-la Wing send for us?" Sally questioned, as

it occurred to her that the clerk might have learned her name in that manner.

The Chinese seemed startled for he glanced sharply at Sally, or so it seemed to her. But he shook his head.

"Mr. Chan wish to see you."

Sally and Thelma felt their last shred of confidence ebbing away. They had a very good idea why Mr. Chan might desire to talk with them and they did not wish to see him. They had no choice, for the Chinese clerk opened the door of the shop owner's den, and softly closed it behind them.

The room was permeated with the fragrant odor of incense and Mr. Chan's wrinkled face was first seen through a haze of smoke which arose from a brass burner on his desk. Behind him the walls were decorated with embroidered silk hangings, but otherwise the room was plainly furnished with American made furniture of no great value.

Mr. Chan arose to offer the girls chairs beside the desk. He did not seem to be aware of their discomfort.

"You do the establishment of Chan high honor in coming here this afternoon," he began ceremoniously. "You have found among my collection a few things worthy of interest?"

"Oh, everything is lovely," Sally said quickly. She did not like Mr. Chan's indirect approach, feeling certain that he was studying her before broaching the real

subject of the interview. She squirmed uneasily in her chair.

"You have noticed among my humble treasures, one which you would like to have for your own?"

"Oh, no!" Thelma and Sally murmured in unison.

Even then they thought that Mr. Chan meant to imply that they were too deeply interested in the emerald, and so were completely dumbfounded when he opened a desk drawer and took out two small but handsomely decorated bowls.

He turned them over, and indicated a six character mark on the bottoms.

"From the Ming Dynasty," he said softly. "You will be unable to purchase their equal anywhere in Chinatown. Accept these bowls with the compliments of the Chan establishment."

Sally and Thelma were amazed at such generosity for well they knew the value of Ming bowls bearing the famous Chinese stamp. Their first elation gave way to caution. Why should Mr. Chan bestow such gifts upon them—strangers?

"The bowls are beautiful," Sally said, "but of course we can't accept them without knowing why they are given. What do you expect in return?"

Mr. Chan seemed troubled by the girl's blunt question, but with a smile he took from another drawer the familiar golden Buddha.

"Ah, I know by your eyes that you have seen it before," he said quietly.

"Yes, in your show room," Sally replied evenly.

"And again when you opened the door of my office a few minutes ago," Mr. Chan added blandly. "I hold you blameless for the unfortunate intrusion, yet I cannot ignore the knowledge which came into your possession. Since you request it, I will speak plainly. You are aware of the secret which this Buddah guards."

"We saw the green stone," Thelma admitted.

"It is a priceless emerald which I hold in trust for my tong. Keep the knowledge to yourselves and you will have repaid me in full for the Ming bowls."

"We will say nothing of what we observed," Sally promised, relieved that the request was such a simple one. "But we do not wish to take the bowls."

"As you desire then," replied Mr. Chan, accepting her refusal as final. "I shall depend upon your word."

"We've already told one person about the emerald," Thelma confessed, looking troubled.

"With whom have you spoken?" Mr. Chan asked and his voice became sharp.

"Li-la Wing."

Mr. Chan made a peculiar sound through his teeth which the girls could not interpret. His eyes narrowed but other than that there was no perceptible

change in his countenance. Yet Sally sensed that the information had not been pleasing to him.

Mr. Chan replaced the Buddha in his desk and arose to signify that the interview had ended.

"By the way, I should like to ask how you knew my name," Sally said as the shop owner moved with them toward the door.

Mr. Chan's thin lips parted in a friendly smile.

"Your father builds ships which I sometimes buy. Several times at his offices I have had the honor of seeing his daughter from the reception room."

"Oh, are you one of my father's customers?" Sally asked in surprise. "I don't remember ever having met you before, but I'll admit I usually dash in and out of the office without glancing at anyone."

"Kindly give my respects to your honored parent."

"Yes, indeed," Sally promised enthusiastically as she and Thelma turned away.

The girls retraced their way toward the auction room.

"Imagine Mr. Chan being acquainted with father and knowing me by sight!" Sally remarked. "Here, we've been conjuring up all sorts of evil connected with this place."

"I guess maybe we've read too many wild stories about Chinatown. Most everything seems to have a logical explanation if one is able to get at it."

"Even the Ning-Wo emerald?" Sally asked with a gay laugh.

The auction had started when the girls found seats at the rear of the crowded room. Thelma nudged Sally, indicating that Li-la stood with a group of persons near the door. She did not appear to notice the girls.

They forgot Li-la as they became absorbed in the fascinating sale. Women vied with one another to bid in costly carvings and antique furniture. An ivory screen was sold for a staggering sum, and then the auctioneer disposed of a long list of trifling articles for comparatively small amounts.

"I wish we'd brought some money with us," Sally said wistfully. "How much do you have, Thelma?"

"Street car fare and that's all."

Sally explored her own pocketbook and to her delight discovered a dollar bill which she had tucked away and forgotten. At that moment the auctioneer chanced to be offering a box of odds and ends, and more for the fun of entering a bid than for any other reason, Sally sang out:

"One dollar!"

No one seemed willing to raise the bid, and the auctioneer who was eager to get on to more important items, "knocked down" the box to the astonished girl.

"I never dreamed I'd get it for only a dollar!" Sally whispered excitedly.

"I don't think you bought very much," Thelma replied scoffingly. "From here it looks like a mess of broken Chinaware and ten cent store junk."

Despite her companion's words, Sally was thrilled by her purchase. She paid scant heed as the auctioneer sold vases, camphorwood chests, jade ornaments and boxes of sandalwood. When the sale finally came to an end, she was one of the first to abandon her chair.

"Come on," she urged Thelma, "let's have a look at that box and see what I bought!"

The girls were trying to push through the crowd when Mr. Chan suddenly appeared in the doorway. He clapped his hands together in a gesture which commanded silence.

"Ladies and gentleman," he began in an agitated voice. "I have suffered a great loss—since the beginning of this sale a priceless gem has been stolen. For the time being no one must leave this room."

CHAPTER III

THE MISSING GEM

A STUNNED silence greeted Mr. Chan's announcement, and then the auction room hummed with conversation. Several customers angrily declared that they would not remain to be questioned, but to their tirades the Chinese clerks at the door turned a deaf ear. Li-la pushed toward the girls, and they noticed that she seemed agitated.

"Do you suppose the emerald has been stolen?" Sally whispered to Thelma. "If so, what a nice position we're in!"

"Yes, we would get into something like this. We may be accused of the theft and turned over to the police."

"It isn't likely the authorities will be called in. The Chinese usually take care of their own difficulties, having nothing to do with our courts."

"We're in for trouble all right," Thelma said with a little moan. "Here comes Mr. Chan toward us now."

To the girls' astonishment, the shop owner did not glance at them, but spoke curtly to Li-la in Chinese. She replied in a defiant tone, and then, apparently

obeying an order from Mr. Chan, submitted to a strong-armed clerk who escorted her from the room.

"Mercy! What do they mean to do with Li-la?" Thelma gasped. "She seems to be under suspicion."

"I hope we didn't get her into trouble by telling Mr. Chan that we had spoken to her about the emerald," Sally murmured anxiously. "Oh, dear, I wish we hadn't come here today."

A clerk passed among the crowd taking down names and addresses. After a few routine questions had been asked many of the customers were allowed to depart. When Sally and Thelma moved toward the door they were politely stopped by one of the clerks.

"Mr. Chan desires to talk with you," they were told. "Will you kindly wait?"

After nearly fifteen minutes of suspense, the girls found themselves once more in Mr. Chan's den. The shop owner stood staring out the window, but as they entered he quickly turned and faced them.

"The gold Buddha has been stolen, and with it the Ning-Wo emerald," he said, with no show of emotion. "Unless I recover the gem I face ruin, for I hold it in trust for my tong."

"When was the Buddha taken?" Sally asked.

"During the auction sale. After our talk together, I left my office for a few minutes to converse with a customer. I discovered the loss upon my return."

Sally and Thelma glanced at each other with mis-

giving, fearing that Mr. Chan suspected them of the robbery. The shop owner seemed to read their thoughts for he said quickly:

"Have no alarm. The daughter of my good friend and her companion are held blameless, yet I must ask you again, have you spoken to anyone of the emerald?"

"Only to Li-la," Sally replied, and realizing that her words placed the Chinese girl under suspicion, she added: "I don't believe that she could have had anything to do with your loss."

Mr. Chan's slow smile told the girls nothing of his thoughts.

"I am sorry to have inconvenienced you today," he said, and then after requesting that Sally convey to Mr. Brandon his sincere compliments, Mr. Chan escorted the girls to the door.

"What could have become of Li-la?" Thelma whispered nervously when they were alone in the gloomy hall. "What have they done with her?"

"Nothing probably," Sally answered, but her voice lacked conviction. "If we're wise we'll not ask too many questions. Come on, let's get our box and start for home."

The girls returned to the nearly deserted auction room, but they discovered after paying for their purchase, that the box was far too heavy for them to carry. Sally did not wish to be assessed an extra delivery charge. A casual glance into the container

convinced her that she had not acquired as great a bargain as she had believed.

"It's just a mess of junk," Thelma declared in disappointment. "I'd not even bother to cart it home."

"I know what I'll do," Sally decided. "I'll go home and get the car. Lin can come back with me to carry the box."

"We'll have to do that unless we pay the delivery charge," Thelma agreed.

No one tried to detain the girls as they left the shop. They went directly to the Brandon home, a large but modest white house which overlooked the bay. Sally did not expect to find anyone there save the Chinese servant, Lin, for her father, Christopher Brandon, a well known builder of speed-boats, would be busy at his office, while her mother had gone to a club tea.

"Lin!" Sally called as the girls entered the house.

There was no answer, but from the kitchen they could hear the metallic clash of utensils.

"I know where he is!" Sally exclaimed. "He's baking something!"

The two girls found the Chinaman almost completely surrounded by sundry ingredients in various stages of preparation, the whole of which eventually was to emerge as a masterpiece of culinary art—a cake by Lin!

"Oh, Lin," Sally said, "I want you to drive us down town in the car, and here you are neck deep in a cake!"

"Me velly solly," Lin said with a grin. He was a slim, active little fellow who slicked his hair back until it shone like patent leather. "Me think Missee gone all day on gad-trip. So makee cake to fill up time."

"How long will it take to finish it, Lin?"

"Maybe one hour. Maybe two hours."

"Oh, we can't wait that long," Sally said impatiently. "Can't you set all those dishes away and finish it some other time?"

"If Missee say so. Me be ready velly quick."

In an incredibly short time, the servant had stowed away his cake in the ice box. He donned his chauffeur's uniform, a purchase which he had made to satisfy his own pride, and quickly backed the big family sedan out onto the driveway. The two girls scrambled into the back seat and hunched down into the deep cushion.

"Drive us to Chan's Oriental Shop, Lin," Sally directed. "We bought a heavy box of stuff at the auction sale there today. We shall want you to help us with it."

"Missee say Chan's!" Lin said with an unbelieving note in his voice.

"Yes, Chan's! You know where that is, don't you?"

"Velly solly," Lin said firmly. "Me not go to Chan's place."

Before the girls realized what he was doing, Lin

quickly deserted his post at the steering wheel, paused for a moment to bow deeply, and then turned on his heel and entered the house. In a few moments they saw a shadow against the kitchen window. Lin had gone back to his cake baking.

"Well, wouldn't that floor you!" Thelma exclaimed slangily. "I guess Bret Harte knew what he was talking about when he wrote that verse:

"That for ways that are dark
And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinees is peculiar,
Which the same I would rise to explain."

"I wish you'd explain Lin to me," Sally said irritably. "He thinks he's the most important member of our family and that his whim is law!"

"Can't you make him drive us down to Chan's?"

"Make him?" Sally laughed shortly. "You don't know Lin. Once he decides a thing, nothing in the world would move him. Last winter he decided that the laundry room looked drab so what did he do but design a few pagodas and dragons for the walls! Mother asked him please not to continue his painting because she didn't care for his style of decoration, but did Lin obey? He did not. Each day a new dragon would go up on the wall."

"I don't think my mother would keep a servant like that."

"Oh, Lin has plenty of good points," Sally said hastily. "He's usually very obliging and he cooks divinely. During the Chinese New Year's he always brings us expensive presents and he seems devoted to the family. I can't understand why he won't do us a little favor now."

"You don't think it would do any good to coax him?"

"Not a bit. Lin has some special reason for not wishing to go. Maybe he belongs to a different tong than Mr. Chan. It's probably a silly thing like that."

"Lin acted almost frightened when he heard Chan's name. Or at least I gathered that impression."

"Yes, he did act funny," Sally admitted thoughtfully.

"I suppose we'll have to give up our idea of getting the box."

"Why should we? One of Mr. Chan's men can lift it into the car for us." Sally promptly slid into the driver's seat. "If we hurry we'll have time to get to the shop before it closes."

"I don't much like the idea of going back there without an escort," Thelma declared as she climbed into the seat beside her chum. "Mr. Chan's shop was a reliable place, but somehow it gave me the creeps—not to mention all the trouble we had about the emerald."

"We'll not run into anything like that again in a

million years. Anyhow, Lin wouldn't have been much of an escort, for if any real danger turned up he'd streak for home faster than one of these new streamlined trains!"

As the car shot backwards down the driveway, Lin's face appeared in the kitchen window, but although the girls saw him, they pretended that his desertion had not troubled them in the least.

"I'll report his conduct to Dad when he comes home," Sally said grimly. "Not that it will do any good. A reprimand slides off Lin like water from a duck. He just says, 'velly solly,' and that's the end of it so far as he's concerned."

The car rolled along a wide boulevard flanked on either side by handsome residences with terraced gardens. They came finally to Chinatown's main thoroughfare and thence to Mr. Chan's shop.

While Thelma waited in the automobile, Sally went inside and arranged for the transfer of the heavy box. Mr. Chan was nowhere about and she hesitated to ask if the emerald had been recovered. She wondered too what had become of Li-la but it was a waste of breath to inquire for her question would be answered with a shrug or an evasive reply.

A courteous clerk carried the box to the car and stood by the curbing until the girls drove away.

The street was too narrow to permit a turn so Sally was compelled to round a block. The girls found

themselves in a twisting alley-like thoroughfare which they had never seen before. It was evil smelling and so crowded with persons that Sally had to pay close attention to her driving.

"There is another car right behind," Thelma reported, glancing back. "Sally, I believe it's following us!"

"Chinese hatchetmen?" Sally asked teasingly.

The smile died from her face, for as they neared the end of the alley, she saw by the car mirror, that the other automobile had speeded up. Before she could make up her mind that Thelma was right, the driver crowded her toward the curbing and then blocked the road. Sally slammed on brakes to avoid a crash.

Two men who wore black masks over their faces, leaped nimbly on the running board. Sally waited for no more. She pressed her finger hard on the horn button and at the same time screamed shrilly for help.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLD BUDDHA

A HAND was clapped roughly over Sally's mouth, but Thelma had taken up the cry. All along the street, faces appeared in shop windows and heads peered down over balconies.

One of the masked men gave an exclamation of anger and made a quick dive for the box in the rear of the automobile. Thelma was too swift for him. Shaking off her own assailant, she gave the man a hard push which sent him reeling backwards from the running board.

The man hesitated, and then seeing that help was close at hand, gave a quick command to his companion. The pair ran to their waiting car which sped away.

The girls were surrounded by an excited, chattering group of Chinamen, not one of whom seemed to understand English.

"Let's get away from here!" Thelma gasped.

Sally could not drive on for the street was crowded with people. Suddenly a policeman appeared, and as if by magic the way cleared. Chinamen vanished

through doorways, and only a few remained to watch.

"What seems to be the matter?" the officer asked.

"Having an argument with a Chink?"

"A car forced us to the curbing, and two masked men jumped on our running board," Sally told him.

"Purse snatchers?"

"I don't think so, officer. They seemed to be after our box."

"Box?"

Sally indicated the container in the back of the car.

"It's just a mess of stuff we bought for a dollar at Mr. Chan's auction sale."

The officer examined the box briefly. He shook his head as he took out his book to make a report.

"It isn't likely they were after that. Probably they were purse snatchers. Can you describe the men or the car?"

"It was either a dark blue or a black car," Thelma supplied. "The driver sat hunched over the steering wheel, and his hat was pulled so low one couldn't see his face."

"The other two men were Chinese," Sally said.

The policeman glanced up from his book. "How do you know?"

"One of them said something in Chinese to his companion."

"You are certain of it?"

"Well, practically so. Of course I was pretty ex-

cited, but—yes, I'm sure the man spoke in Chinese."

The policeman's expression disclosed that he did not believe Sally could be correct. He explained: "Usually a Chinaman doesn't attempt a crime of this sort, and he has very little to do with white women in any way. He regards them as beneath his notice."

Sally's lips closed firmly. She felt certain the men had been after the box, but why they should want it was a deep mystery. She did not wish to stress her belief, knowing that the policeman was apt to appropriate the box and take it to the station for examination.

"Can you tell me anything more about the men?" the officer asked.

Sally and Thelma shook their heads. They had been too busy fighting off their assailants to make any observations.

"I suppose you didn't notice the license number of the car?"

Again the girls replied in the negative.

"I'll make a report of this," the policeman promised after he had written down their names and addresses, "but with such a meager description, I'm afraid it won't do much good. I'd advise you to keep away from Chinese auction sales after this."

"Thanks, that's what we intended to do," Sally answered.

The policeman rode with her to the next corner

leaving the car when he was certain that she knew how to find her way out of the district.

"So Chinatown is supposed to be safe!" Thelma exclaimed when they were rolling along one of the wide boulevards. "Sally, why were those men after our box?"

"That's what I want to learn," Sally answered, her eyes on the road. "Maybe it contains something valuable."

"In that case you wouldn't think Mr. Chan would allow it to go for a dollar."

"Not unless a mistake had been made."

"I hope we're not getting ourselves mixed up in any smuggling activities."

"Oh, I don't believe there's any danger of that," Sally said. "Mr. Chan is an honorable man with a high standing in the community."

"At least he's supposed to be. But you must admit that several peculiar things have happened to us today."

"Yes," Sally laughed, "I feel almost as if I'm the chief performer in a melodrama!"

"We'll have a lot to tell the other girls, but probably they'll think we're making up the entire tale."

Sally gave her chum a sideways glance as she skillfully steered around a truck loaded with orange crates.

"Thelma, I don't think we ought to say anything about what happened today—at least not to anyone

except our parents. It seems to me that we may have stumbled into something rather sinister. If we talk—well, things might happen.”

Thelma’s blue eyes opened wide.

“Now don’t act so terrified,” Sally laughed. “I doubt that any Chinaman will carry us off to a torture chamber, but I believe it would be wise to forget as much of this as we can.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Thelma agreed instantly. “What about the box? Maybe we ought to get rid of it.”

“Not until I found out what it contains. Haven’t you a speck of curiosity, Thelma?”

“Loads of it, but I don’t want to get into any more trouble. You just said—”

“I know, but it will do no harm to examine the box. If we find smuggled goods or anything like that—” she broke off and ended: —“but such a thing isn’t likely for I’m sure Mr. Chan is an honest merchant.”

Lin had finished baking his cake when the girls reached the Brandon home. He peered curiously from the kitchen door as the sedan halted on the driveway.

“Come and help us, please,” Sally called, swinging open the car door to expose the box of nick-nacks.

“Looks velly heavy,” Lin said with a distinct note of mental reservation in his voice.

“Well, it isn’t exactly a box of feathers,” Sally re-

plied. "But you are not only a marvelous cook, Lin, you are blessed with a very strong back."

"Missee make much nice soft talk," Lin observed with a grin. He dived into the rear of the sedan and came out bearing the box which he shifted to his shoulder.

"Missee go first. Say where want junk mixture."

The girls laughed at Lin's description of their purchase and preceded him into the house.

"Take it into the library," Sally directed after a moment's thought.

"Attic much better," Lin said stubbornly.

"No, the library," Sally insisted. "Maybe after I've looked at the things I'll have you carry the box upstairs."

Lin scowled with displeasure for he had tidied the library only that afternoon and he did not wish to see it cluttered with the miscellaneous contents of the box. He set down the purchase and then stood waiting expectantly.

"That will be all, Lin," Sally told him.

"Yes, Missee." Lin bestowed a curious glance at the box as he softly retreated.

Sally carefully closed the folding doors. Already Thelma had fallen on her knees beside the box and was beginning to lift out various articles.

"I've seen trinkets like these in the dime store," she

said in disappointment. "They're of Japanese manufacture."

"Here's something which isn't," Sally cried, picking up a heavy China platter. "Oh, it's chipped in two places."

The girls found more crockery, but not a single piece was in good condition. Next Sally took out a small sandalwood box which she thought might serve to hold handkerchiefs.

A rap on the door interrupted their explorations.

"What is it?" Sally called.

"'Phone call," informed the voice of Lin.

"It's probably Mother," Sally told Thelma. "I'll be back in a minute."

The telephone call was not from Mrs. Brandon. As Sally held the receiver to her ear, a broken voice said clearly:

"Mr. Chan speaking."

"Mr. Chan?" Sally inquired doubtfully. The voice did not sound familiar, for over the telephone his accent seemed pronounced.

"You purchased a box at our sale today," the voice went on.

"Yes, that is correct."

"A mistake was made by an employee. The box must be returned."

Sally remained silent.

"Our men will call for the box," continued Mr. Chan. "If it has not been opened you will be paid a suitable sum of money for your inconvenience."

Sally did not like the shop owner's tone, and before she stopped to consider her words, she said evenly:

"I am sorry, Mr. Chan, but I bought the box and I have a perfect right to examine it." She then hung up the receiver.

Sally turned around to glimpse Lin lingering near the doorway. He moved quickly on toward the kitchen but she knew he had been listening to the telephone conversation.

Sally was sorely troubled as she went back to the library. She did not fully understand her own refusal to accede to Mr. Chan's wishes. After advising Thelma that they would do well to avoid becoming entangled in some sinister affair which concerned only a few personages of Chinatown, she had spurned the safe course. If Mr. Chan really wanted the box, he would find a means of acquiring it.

"Sally, I've found a pretty fair pair of bookends," Thelma reported as her chum reappeared in the doorway. "Why, what's wrong?"

"We've been ordered by Mr. Chan to return the box unopened."

"He wants this junk back?" Thelma demanded incredulously.

"That's what he says."

"Then let him come after it—I never heard of such a way to do business."

"I told Mr. Chan he couldn't have the box."

"You did!"

"It was a silly thing to do," Sally acknowledged ruefully. "I acted impulsively. Mr. Chan will probably send one of his clerks here anyway, and I'll have to give up the box."

"I certainly should," Thelma advised, "but I'd make Mr. Chan return your money."

"He offered to do more than that. Thelma, there's something valuable in this box which we haven't found. I'm going to discover what it is before Mr. Chan gets here."

The girls began their search in earnest, removing articles as quickly as they could. Suddenly Sally drew in her breath for her hand had touched a peculiarly shaped object.

"Oh, good gracious!"

"What is it?" Thelma asked tensely.

There was no need for Sally to reply. She had brought to light a gilded figure. It was Mr. Chan's missing Buddha.

CHAPTER V

A TELEPHONE CALL

"How did that thing get into our box?" Thelma gasped in dismay. "We'll be accused of stealing!"

"It's Mr. Chan's Buddha all right," Sally agreed, turning the figure over in her hand. She removed the bottom plug and thrust her fingers through the opening.

"Is the emerald still there?" Thelma asked with bated breath.

Sally drew forth the tiny silk pouch which she had seen in Mr. Chan's possession, and with trembling hands unloosened the draw string. As she shook the little bag, a gleaming green gem fell into her lap.

"Oh, did you ever see anything so gorgeous?" Thelma murmured. "And to think, you bought it for a dollar!"

"Oh, no I didn't! I'd not have this stone in my possession at any price. I'll send it straight back to Mr. Chan. Why didn't he tell me in the first place that this was the reason he wanted the box."

"Sally," Thelma whispered warningly.

Sally turned her head to see Lin standing in the doorway.

"Missee call?" he inquired innocently.

"No, I didn't call," Sally replied sternly, trying to hide the Buddha with her hand. "Now close those doors and please don't bother us again."

"Yes, Missee," Lin said, bowing. They heard the soft pad, pad of his slippers as he went back to the kitchen.

"Do you think he saw the Buddha?" Thelma asked anxiously.

"Lin sees everything. Sometimes I think he has eyes in the back of his head. Nothing ever escapes him. He soaks up information like a sponge, but just try to get anything out of him!"

"Well, even if he did see the figure, he couldn't know about the emerald. You had that well covered."

"I can't understand how the Buddha chanced to be in our box," Sally said, frowning thoughtfully. "The thief who stole the emerald from Mr. Chan must have dropped it there when he thought everyone was to be searched. That's the only way I can figure it out."

"Then how did Mr. Chan learn that the Buddha was in your possession?"

Sally shook her head. "It's too deep for me. But I know one thing! I shall telephone Mr. Chan this minute and tell him to come here and get his old

emerald. If I don't he's apt to descend on me with a squad of police."

"Yes, I'd call him right away," Thelma agreed anxiously. "We'd be in an awkward situation if the gem should be found in our possession."

Sally replaced the emerald in the Buddha which she dropped back into the box, covering it over with a top layer of bric-a-brac. Thelma went with her to telephone.

After a brief wait, Sally heard a well modulated voice at the other end of the wire.

"Is this Mr. Chan?" she inquired doubtfully, for the man spoke in an entirely different tone than he had used a few minutes earlier.

"Yes, Chan speaking," the merchant replied.

"This is Sally Brandon," the girl stammered. "When I talked with you a moment ago, I didn't realize why you wanted the box. You may come for it now if you wish."

"Box?" Mr. Chan inquired politely.

"Yes, you telephoned me a few minutes ago—didn't you?"

"I have telephoned no one."

"But someone called me and gave your name," Sally protested. "A man who said he was Mr. Chan requested me to return the box of things which I purchased this afternoon at your shop."

"I do not understand."

"I was told not to open the box, Mr. Chan. But I did, and I found your Buddha."

"My emerald is safe?" Mr. Chan asked, and his voice rose to a higher pitch.

"Yes, I have it here at the house. Will you send someone for it at once?"

"I will come myself without loss of a moment. Await me."

Sally hung up the receiver and turned to Thelma.

"Mr. Chan didn't know a thing about that other telephone call," she revealed. "Someone impersonated his voice."

"This affair is beginning to give me the creeps, Sally. Who do you suppose made the first call?"

"Perhaps the thief who stole the emerald. I figure it out like this. Someone must have taken the Buddha from Mr. Chan's office and slipped into the auction room. Then when it was evident that everyone might be searched, the person dropped the Buddha into this box of junk."

"Intending to bid for it later, you think?"

"Perhaps. But you remember the auctioneer didn't give anyone time for a second bid. He was anxious to hurry the sale along, and he knocked the box down to me almost before the words were out of my mouth."

"That's so."

"And then we were stopped in the alley," Sally continued. "The persons who wanted the Buddha evidently had followed us from Chan's establishment. They tried to snatch the box from us, and failing in that attempted to offer us money."

"Your theory is interesting at least," Thelma smiled. "Perhaps when Mr. Chan arrives he'll be able to fill in some of the gaps."

"I wish Father or Mother would get home ahead of Mr. Chan," Sally said anxiously. "I could use a little of their advice."

She dreaded the interview with Mr. Chan, and did not like the responsibility which had been forced upon her. After a little reflection, she telephoned her father's office at the ship yards. A secretary told her that Mr. Brandon had left nearly an hour before to attend an important meeting. There was not much likelihood that he would return home until the dinner hour.

"I should have suspected that it wasn't Mr. Chan who first telephoned," Sally declared as the girls waited in the living room for their visitor. "I knew his voice didn't sound right."

"I hope Mr. Chan won't blame us for having the emerald."

"He ought to be glad to get it back. I don't see how he could believe that we had anything to do with the theft."

"I wonder how Lin will react when he sees Mr. Chan?" Thelma presently asked. "He didn't want to go to the shop with us, you remember."

"Their meeting may prove awkward," Sally admitted. "Perhaps I ought to think of some pretext for getting rid of Lin while Mr. Chan is here."

"You might send him on an errand to the store."

Sally went to the kitchen in search of the Chinaman. He was not there so thinking that he might have gone to his room on the attic floor, she went to the stairway and called. Lin did not answer.

"I'm sure he's somewhere in the house," Sally complained as she rejoined Thelma. "He's just having a contrary spell today."

As she spoke, the girls heard a banging noise from the direction of the library which sounded very much like a window slamming down.

"If Lin is prying into our box I'll ask Father to discharge him!" Sally exclaimed, as she and Thelma hurried to see what had happened.

When they reached the library everything was as they had left it. Lin was not there, the windows were closed and the box apparently had not been touched.

"I was certain I heard someone in this room," Sally said in perplexity. "I'll venture it was Lin too, but he's quick as a cat."

She went to the window and looked out. The yard was deserted, but just at that moment a large blue

automobile stopped at the curbing in front of the house.

"It's Mr. Chan," Sally reported, and added with a giggle: "He's all togged out in a long, silk dress-coat!"

The girls waited for the doorbell to ring, and when they were certain that Lin, if he were at home, had no intention of answering, they hastened to admit the Chinese merchant. He gave them each a ceremonious greeting, and then asked Sally to elaborate upon her telephone communication.

Here in the familiar surroundings of the Brandon home, the girls found it much easier to talk with Mr. Chan. Sally told him of their encounter with the two masked men, but although she watched the merchant's face closely it was impossible to know what he thought.

"You have the Buddha?" he inquired calmly.

"Yes, come with us to the library, and I'll show you exactly where we found it," Sally invited. "We have no idea how it chanced to be in our box."

Mr. Chan followed the girls to the room at the far end of the house. Sally did not trouble to close the library doors behind them, for by this time she was convinced that Lin really had gone away somewhere. She was certain that he had absented himself deliberately, possibly because he had known that Mr. Chan was coming and did not wish to meet him.

"I owe you a debt which I shall seek all my life to

repay," the merchant said quietly. "The loss of the Ning-Wo emerald would have resulted in financial ruin, and might have cost me my life."

"I am glad that we were instrumental in recovering it for you," Sally said as she began to remove articles from the box. "I am relieved also that the finding of the gem will exonerate Li-la Wing."

Mr. Chan's eyes burned with a strange light, and when he replied his voice was not quite so friendly.

"You are well acquainted with Li-la Wing?"

"We met her in school."

Mr. Chan remained discreetly silent and Sally turned her attention once more to the box. Thelma knelt down beside her to assist.

"The Buddha was left almost on top," she told Sally. "I remember we tucked it down into a corner."

"It's not there now," Sally murmured beginning to grow anxious.

Mr. Chan moved closer as the girls removed everything from the box. Not until the last article had been exposed, could they admit the truth.

The Buddha was gone.

CHAPTER VI

THE YELLOW PAPER

"WHY, the Buddha was here only a few minutes ago!" Sally exclaimed disbelievingly. "How could it have vanished?"

"It *must* be somewhere in this room," Thelma murmured anxiously. She began sorting the articles which they had taken from the box.

Mr. Chan muttered something in Chinese which the girls did not understand. Losing his serenity, he fired questions at them, asking when they had last seen the Buddha and who had been in the house during the past hour.

"Why, no one except ourselves," Sally answered. "And Lin."

"Lin?" Mr. Chan seized upon the name.

"He is our servant and has been with us for years."

"I should like to speak with him."

"I don't think he's here now," Sally said. "In fact, I rather believe he's been gone for the past half hour. Lin wouldn't know anything about the Buddha."

"How can you be sure?" Mr. Chan asked. "I do

not recall the fellow by name, but I have many enemies who plot my ruin."

"Oh, Lin isn't like that, Mr. Chan."

"Is he a member of the Han See tong?"

"Dear me, I have no idea," Sally admitted.

It occurred to her that she really knew very little about Lin's private life. Six days a week the Chinaman remained more or less dutifully at the Brandon home accomplishing the work of three maids, but on Friday evening he donned his best blue serge suit and was seen no more until the following day. Where he went no one asked. Sometimes upon his return he brought Sally gifts of lily bulbs or lichee nuts, but he never told her what he did with his spare time.

Although Sally instinctively had risen to Lin's defense, at heart she was not so confident that he had no knowledge of the missing Buddha. He had been very curious regarding the box, and she recalled his reluctance to meet Mr. Chan. But to betray her thoughts to the merchant she dared not do, for despite Lin's provoking ways, she esteemed him highly.

Sally went out into the hall and called Lin's name. When he did not answer she returned to the library.

"He isn't here, Mr. Chan. But I promise I'll question him when he comes in. I feel dreadful about the emerald and I'll do everything in my power to help you recover it."

The merchant did not appear to be listening. He

had stooped to pick up an object from the floor. It was a rectangular slip of yellow rice paper.

"What is that?" Thelma asked.

Mr. Chan did not reply for several moments. He stared at the paper and then carefully placed it in his billfold.

"Merely a calling card left unintentionally by one who may have taken the Buddha," he said quietly.

Mr. Chan did not seem to have any interest in examining the box, the room, or in questioning the girls further. The loss of the emerald had been a severe blow to him, but he considered any display of emotion beneath his dignity. Picking up his hat and walking stick, he bade the girls goodbye and left the house.

"What was that yellow paper he took with him?" Thelma asked when the girls were alone in the library. "Did you see it, Sally?"

"Yes, but so far as I could tell it was just a blank slip of yellow paper."

"Mr. Chan acted so strangely when he saw it—just as if it were a clue to the identity of the thief."

"It did have some special significance for him—I'm sure of that," Sally said thoughtfully.

"How in the world did it get into the library?" Thelma speculated. "If anyone had entered the house we surely would have known it."

"We did hear a noise in the library as if some one

had slammed a window. But I can't make myself believe an outsider did the job, for who would have known about the box?"

"Lin."

Sally's frown deepened. "I was thinking of him. You may be sure I'll do plenty of investigating if he ever comes home again!"

For a time the girls remained in the library talking over their many strange experiences of the day. Mr. Chan had refrained from blaming them for the loss of the emerald, yet they felt that they had been careless in allowing the Buddha to remain unguarded.

"Listen!" Sally presently commanded.

The girls heard a sound from the direction of the kitchen not unlike that of a refrigerator door closing.

"I believe Lin has sneaked in," Sally whispered. "Let's go out and see."

They tiptoed toward the rear of the house. Cracking the kitchen door an inch or two, they saw the missing Lin busily preparing a cream sauce.

"So here you are," Sally called out as the girls marched into the kitchen. "We've been looking everywhere for you, Lin. Where were you?"

"Go to grocery market," he answered briefly.

"But where are the groceries?" Sally asked suspiciously. "I don't see any packages."

"Lin velly tired. So me say to clerk-boy: 'Bling food objects in automobile wagon!'"

"Oh, I didn't know you ever had the groceries delivered," Sally replied. She did not believe Lin's explanation, but she thought it best not to disclose her doubt outright. She changed the subject of the conversation and then very deviously asked the servant if he had been near the library.

"No, Misseel!" Lin's voice had a sincere ring. "Last time me in book-room callee to you make long telephone chatter-talk."

The girls left the kitchen more puzzled than before. Sally was only half inclined to believe that Lin had told the truth.

"At first I thought he might have taken the Buddha through curiosity or perhaps because he wanted to play a prank, but it's more serious than that."

"You feel he stole the figure then?"

"Lin has always been scrupulously honest," Sally responded soberly. "In all the years he's worked for us he never took anything. It's hard for me to believe he'd do it now even if the evidence is against him."

"He may have gone to the grocery store as he said."

Sally shook her head. "Lin never does his marketing at this hour of the day, and furthermore, he never has anything delivered. He thought that one up on the spur of the moment."

"Of course, we can't be sure Lin was in the house at the time the emerald was stolen, because we failed to hear him leave. That window slamming—"

"Let's investigate that angle right now," Sally proposed. "If anyone entered the house through the library window, we ought to find footprints outside."

Shrubbery which grew along the wall of the residence did not appear to have been disturbed. Although the girls parted the bushes carefully, they found no prints of any sort in the soft earth beneath the windows.

Returning to the living room, Sally and Thelma stopped short as they heard Lin's voice. He was in the hallway telephoning a grocery store, trying to make a clerk understand that he must have an order delivered at once to the Brandon residence.

As Sally appeared in the doorway, Lin banged the receiver into the hook.

"Grocery market velly slow," he said, retreating toward the kitchen. "Lin callem hurry up fast."

Sally waited until the door had closed behind the Chinaman. Then she turned to Thelma, and her face was grimly determined.

"It may not be the thing to do, but I'm going to search Lin's room for the Buddha! I want you to guard the stairway for me, Thelma. If Lin appears, do something to detain him."

Making certain that the Chinaman was busy in the kitchen, the girls tiptoed to the second floor. Thelma stationed herself by the stairway while Sally climbed

on up to the attic room. Ten minutes later she returned.

"Did you find it?" Thelma asked eagerly.

"Not a chance. Lin has everything under lock and key. I guess he's not as trusting as we are!"

"Lin must lead a double life or he'd not have secrets to guard."

"I'd never been in his room before," Sally declared. "He has completely ruined the walls with his outlandish dragons and pagodas, and every picture is signed with his name in letters about a mile high! Just wait until Mother hears of this!"

"You can't very well expose Lin without exposing yourself."

"That's so," Sally admitted, somewhat taken aback. "Of course I mean to tell my parents all about the emerald when they come home. Father ought to know how to deal with Lin."

Thelma glanced at her wrist watch and was horrified to see that it was after five-thirty.

"I must dash home right away," she announced. "We have dinner at six and Mother is expecting guests."

As Thelma hurried down the walk, a car turned in at the Brandon driveway, barely missing the trunk of a eucalyptus tree. Sally's mother and father were returning home together, for Mrs. Brandon had picked him up downtown.

Sally ran out to meet them, and even before they had alighted from the car, she began to pour out her story.

"Dear me, what are you saying?" Mrs. Brandon asked. "You are so excited, Sally! Are you trying to tell us about a movie you saw this afternoon?"

"It happened right in this house! Some one took the Ning-Wo emerald and I suspect it may have been Lin! Mr. Chan was here and we've had a terrible time!"

"I don't believe I'll allow you to visit Chinatown again if it stirs you up like this," Mrs. Brandon said severely. "I can't make head nor tail of what you are trying to say."

"Mr. Chan was here at our house?" inquired Sally's father who seemed to have followed the tale in a general way. "Why, I know the man fairly well."

"I don't think he'll ever buy any more boats from you," Sally said ruefully. "Thelma and I probably settled that. What sort of person is Mr. Chan, Dad?"

"A very reliable merchant. I always like to deal with Chan, because unlike many of his race, he regards Whites as human beings. In the main Chinese feel a supreme contempt for us, but Chan has been well educated and he has a liberal spirit."

"I hope you're right about the liberal spirit," Sally laughed uneasily. "He very easily could blame Thelma and me for losing his emerald."

"What is this emerald you keep mentioning?" Mrs. Brandon asked in perplexity. "Please start at the beginning and tell us everything."

The three went inside, and after closing the living room off so that Lin would not hear, Sally related everything that had occurred. Mrs. Brandon was horrified to learn that her only daughter had been exposed to such danger, but Mr. Brandon went straight to the heart of Sally's problem.

"We'll have to recover that gem for Mr. Chan," he said. "From what I know of Chinese tongs, Chan faces ruin and perhaps death unless the emerald is found."

"But it's ridiculous to accuse Lin of having a part in the affair," Mrs. Brandon protested.

"I'm not so sure," her husband replied slowly. "Few persons understand the workings of a Chinaman's mind. The Chinese have an entirely different heritage than ours, and where we approach a problem directly, they use subtlety."

"Will you talk with Lin?" Sally asked eagerly.

"Yes, certainly, but I may succeed only in losing a good cook."

For an hour Mr. Brandon closeted himself with Lin, but at the end of that period the servant emerged from the conference sullen and silent. The ship builder had learned absolutely nothing.

"I don't know what more I can do," Mr. Brandon

told his wife. "For the time being we'll have to let the matter rest, and just keep an eye on Lin."

Sally did not feel like remaining inactive. Although no one had blamed her, she accused herself of being responsible for the loss of the emerald. In thinking back over the events of the day, she suddenly remembered Li-la Wing's interest in the Buddha.

"Li-la may know something about the affair," she reflected. "I wish I could talk with her again."

Impulsively, Sally ran to the telephone and called Thelma.

"How would you like another adventure?" she inquired eagerly.

"No more, thank you," Thelma responded firmly. But she asked curiously: "What do you have up your sleeve now?"

"A trip to Moon-Gate estate. How would you like to drive out there tomorrow afternoon?"

"Moon-Gate estate?" Thelma echoed, for a moment not recalling that it was Li-la's home. "Oh, I'd like to visit that place!"

"Then I'll drop by for you directly after luncheon tomorrow," Sally promised. "I have a feeling that Li-la may be able to tell us a great deal about the Ning-Wo emerald."

CHAPTER VII

A SECRET PORTAL

PROMPTLY at two o'clock the following afternoon, a staccato "toot-toot" warned Thelma that Sally's car was ready to take off from the Brandon driveway. She pulled on her hat and without bothering to use the walk, scrambled through a gap in the hedge which separated the French property from the neighboring residence.

"Have you been waiting long, Sally?"

"Only a minute. There's no hurry for it shouldn't take us long to drive out to Moon-Gate estate."

"I hope you know where it is located, because I don't," Thelma said as she climbed into the car.

"I have a general idea and we'll inquire along the road. Mother and Father aren't very crazy about me making the trip."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, they've had a case of the shudders ever since the Chinatown escapade. But they finally agreed I might go."

"If you think we'll run into any more trouble—"

"Not a chance of it, Thelma. Li-la is a good friend of ours and she invited us to visit her."

"We really don't know a thing about her," Thelma pointed out doubtfully. "When she invited us I don't imagine she had any idea we'd accept."

"Well, that's her misfortune," Sally laughed. "I've always wanted to visit Moon-Gate and this is our opportunity."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"I gathered a little information last night from both my father and Lin. The estate is considered quite a show place and Li-la lives there with her uncle, Mr. Wing. It's not really a home, but an elaborate, expensive, amusement park with everything done in Chinese style."

"Will it cost us anything to get in?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Wing charges no admission to his gardens, but by various means he manages to collect plenty before the customer escapes. At the Chinese restaurant the cover charge alone is two dollars."

"I hope you brought along some ham sandwiches."

"Moon-Gate is pretty dead during the daytime," Sally smiled. "I don't think we'll need to spend anything."

The road wound along a well-paved boulevard, carried the girls beyond a zone of amusement concessions, past the border of a park guarded by Dutch

windmills, and on into the country. Sally and Thelma caught glimpses of the blue Pacific, but the spectacular views were so familiar to them that they scarcely turned their heads to look.

A half hour's drive found the girls in need of both gasoline and information. They turned in at a convenient filling station to inquire the way to Moon-Gate estate. It was closer than they had hoped, only a mile and a half down a private side road.

Taking the first turn to the right, the girls drove beneath a long canopy of shade trees. They came at last to an estate surrounded by a high iron fence and tall-growing foliage.

"This must be the place," Thelma declared.

The iron fence led to an imposing scroll-work gate, guarded by a sleepy Chinaman who had stretched himself full length on the velvety grass. As the car slowed down, he came to life, regarding the girls with an intent stare.

"Your cards of admission," he requested politely as they waited for him to open the gate.

"Oh, I didn't know we had to have them," Sally said in embarrassment. "Can't we go in anyway?"

"Very sorry, Miss. Mr. Wing's orders."

"But we came to see Li-la Wing," Thelma protested. "We're her friends. She invited us."

The Chinaman wavered, and finally when the girls

assured him that Li-la knew them well, he swung open the gate and allowed them to pass through.

"He's still watching us," Thelma reported, glancing back. "He seems to think something is wrong."

"Well, we're in anyway," Sally chuckled. "I had no idea this place was so exclusive."

The girls parked the car in an enclosure which had been provided for the purpose. Dense semi-tropical greenery created an illusion that they were isolated from the outside world by a friendly forest.

"Where is the house?" Thelma inquired.

"It must be this way," Sally said, indicating a trail which led through the trees.

The girls walked for a short distance and then halted with a gasp of delight as they came unexpectedly upon an artificial lake spanned by a high arching bridge, covered over with a pagoda roof. Strings of lanterns criss-crossed overhead, and a group of empty dragon boats had been tied up along the shore.

"Oh, wouldn't you love to have a ride?" Thelma cried. "The prows are made to resemble the heads of Chinese dragons!"

"It would be fun," Sally agreed enthusiastically. "We'll have to come back here at night sometime when the place is open."

"We may never get inside the gate again. I can't see why one has to have a card of admission."

"Li-la should fix that up for us," Sally replied confidently. "I wish we could find the house."

They passed smaller pools where croaking frogs sunned themselves on lily pads; they saw many strange flowers and the air was sweet with their perfume. Beyond a pagoda tea house they glimpsed a larger, more elegant building.

"That must be where Li-la lives with her uncle," Sally declared. "I hope she won't be annoyed because we came."

They presented themselves at the door, pulling a latch string which jingled a bell somewhere within the house. A pretty Chinese maid servant answered the summons, but she looked troubled upon hearing that they wished to see Li-la.

Instead of inviting them into the house, she vanished.

"Now what are we supposed to do?" Thelma asked.

"Stand here and wait, I guess. She didn't close the door upon us."

Ten minutes elapsed before they heard soft footsteps along the corridor. Li-la, her black, straight hair glossy with ointment, and wearing trousers of pale blue, suddenly appeared before them.

"Sally! Thelma!" she exclaimed, and there was no cordiality in her voice, only fear.

"We were driving this way, and thought we'd stop in for a minute," Sally murmured uncomfortably. "You were so kind to invite us—"

Li-la's tense attitude relaxed, and she smiled. She opened the door for them.

"Lotus should never have allowed you to wait here," she said. "Come in, please."

"We're not intruding?" Thelma asked uneasily. She had observed Li-la and the Chinese maid exchange a quick glance, the meaning of which she had been unable to fathom.

"You are most welcome," Li-la responded, a trifle perfunctorily.

She led the girls to a room at the rear of the house which evidently was her own. The walls were rich with hangings and the only piece of furniture which looked comfortable was a bed covered with silk draperies. Li-la motioned Thelma and Sally to seat themselves on low, square teakwood stools.

A feeling of restraint fell upon the three, and no one could think of anything to say. Sally wished to ask Li-la about the Ning-Wo emerald, but she hesitated to bring up the subject so soon after her arrival.

"You have a lovely home," Thelma said politely. "The gardens are beautiful."

"Yes," replied Li-la without enthusiasm.

"We thought we wouldn't be able to see you after all," Sally said. "The man at the gate didn't want to let us through."

Li-la smiled faintly. "Usually no one is admitted

during the day. You must have talked very persuasively."

"It was all right for us to come here?" Thelma questioned uncomfortably.

"Oh, yes—yes, certainly." Li-la spoke hurriedly, avoiding the direct gaze of her friends.

"We were a little worried about you after we left Mr. Chan's establishment," Sally ventured.

"Worried?"

"Yes, when Mr. Chan called you from the room, we didn't know what it meant. We were afraid we might have made trouble for you unintentionally."

"Oh, no."

"Then he didn't say anything to you about the emerald?" Thelma asked bluntly.

"I am not concerned with the loss of Mr. Chan's gem," Li-la replied coldly. She rang a gong and almost instantly the Chinese maid, Lotus, appeared. Sally and Thelma realized then that the servant had never been out of range of their voices.

"Will you bring tea, Lotus?" Li-la requested.

"No, we can't stay," Sally said firmly.

Li-la lost her serenity, realizing that the girls had taken offense.

"Oh, you must remain," she urged. "If only you knew—your visit is the breath of life to me!"

Sally and Thelma gazed at each other uncertainly

and as they hesitated, Li-la again bade the Chinese girl to bring tea. The moment the three were alone, she said in a low tone:

"Forgive me for the way I have acted. There are many things which I cannot explain. I hate living here at Moon-Gate estate but I am as helpless as a bird in a cage."

Thelma and Sally wondered if they were hearing correctly.

"Why, I think the grounds are lovely," Thelma stammered.

"Oh, the grounds!" Li-la responded with a shrug. "It is the life I resent. My uncle belongs to the old order. A girl must live in seclusion according to his traditions. He expects me to obey unquestioningly and to look up to him as I would to a master. I should like to cut my hair and go to an American school. I should like to have friends of my own choosing."

"And can't you?" Sally asked.

"I am virtually my uncle's prisoner," Li-la replied bitterly.

She lowered her voice as Lotus was heard approaching. The maid placed a tray of tea things, with tiny frosted cakes and preserved ginger on a low table before Li-la. She then bowed herself from the room, but evidently she did not go far, for Li-la's talk again became stilted and meaningless.

Sally and Thelma felt more at ease now, and they amused their friend by telling her of various incidents connected with their school life. The subject of Mr. Chan and the Ning-Wo emerald was avoided studiously.

Presently, having finished their tea, the girls said that they must go.

"I will show you the house," Li-la offered. "My uncle is away."

She took them from one room to the other, but Sally noticed that it was seldom that they were beyond the gaze of the watchful Lotus. There were so many things which she wished to say to Li-la, which under the circumstance were out of the question. Sally offered polite compliments as she viewed rich hangings, priceless collections of Ming, and elaborately carved furniture, but her mind was far removed from the scene. Had Li-la meant her words literally when she had said that she was virtually the prisoner of her uncle? And why had the girl refused to speak of Mr. Chan or the Ning-Wo emerald?

Sally's thoughts came back to the present when she heard Thelma say in a tone of awe:

"What a strange wall decoration!"

The girls were standing in a large room which appeared to be a council chamber for a massive table with twelve chairs occupied the central position. The wall at the far end was decorated with two high panels

which bore paintings of pink cherry blossoms, but the center object, a circular, moon-shaped picture set slightly back in a recess, held Sally's attention.

"Would you like to see our library?" Li-la asked hurriedly.

"Yes, but first, if you don't mind, I'd like to examine those wall paintings," Sally replied. "What a strange circular frame!"

"You are looking not at a picture but a door," Li-la said quietly.

"A door!" both girls exclaimed.

"Yes, I call it the moon-gate door, because it has been patterned after the famous moon-gate at the Emperor's palace at Peiping."

"And does it really open and close?" Sally inquired in wonder.

"Yes, but I do not know the secret."

"You mean it's a sort of magic door with a hidden lock?" Thelma gasped.

"The magic is the result of my uncle's ingenious mind."

"I wish we could see the moon-gate door open," Thelma said wistfully.

"That is impossible. I should not have brought you to this room, and my uncle would be very angry to know that I had told you about the door."

"We'll say nothing about it to anyone," Sally promised. "I suppose the door opens into a garden."

"No, it does not enter a garden," Li-la responded. She was silent a moment before she added: "I have no idea what lies beyond the portal."

"You have never gone through the door?" Sally asked in amazement.

"The room beyond the moon-gate is a secret one," Li-la answered, her voice low. "Please, I can tell you no more."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LANTERN FESTIVAL

LI-LA seemed so distressed by questions concerning the moon-gate door, that Sally and Thelma tactfully dropped the subject. Yet as their companion escorted them from the room, they could not refrain from casting a curious glance toward the mysterious wall.

Sally thought: "How could Li-la live in a house and not know what lies behind that door? Surely she must have no curiosity or else live in sheer terror of offending her uncle."

"We really must be going," Thelma said when the girls were in the entrance hall. "Even now we'll be late getting home."

"It has meant so much—seeing you again," Li-la replied.

"I hope you'll come to visit us soon," Sally ventured.

"I wish I could. I wish so many things—"

Li-la's voice died away, for a door had opened. Framed in it stood a Chinese gentleman, immaculately turned out in garments of the latest American fashion. His finger nails were long and pointed and he wore a conspicuous jade ring which seemed to fairly shriek

its cost. His expression chilled Sally and Thelma by its icy appraisal.

Li-la bowed almost to the floor, speaking rapidly in Chinese. Then she presented the girls to her uncle.

Mr. Wing responded politely enough, but all the while his eyes regarded them narrowly.

"We are honored to have you in our home," he said, rubbing his fat hands together. "Li-la has made you welcome?"

"Oh, yes," Sally answered nervously. "We were just leaving."

She waited an instant, half expecting that either Li-la or Mr. Wing would urge them to come again. Neither spoke.

Lotus appeared, the door opened and closed behind them. Thelma and Sally stood by the threshold for a moment, somewhat dazed by the rapidity of their exit.

Before either could speak, they heard Mr. Wing's voice from within. A window had been left open, and the harsh words came to them very clearly.

"Who are these girls?"

"You heard their names, my uncle. They are friends and meant no harm."

"We have no friends save those of our own race. You made them understand that they are never to come here again?"

"They will not come. Your wishes will be obeyed."

Sally and Thelma moved hurriedly away, dismayed to learn that they had intruded where they were unwelcome.

"I think Li-la really wanted to see us," Thelma remarked when the girls were in their car. "She acted lonesome."

"I gathered the same impression, but one can't be sure of anything. Mr. Wing was so very polite to us, yet all the while he regarded us with deep contempt."

"It may have been his manner."

"That man has a mean disposition," Sally declared feelingly. "No wonder Li-la hates him."

"We don't know she does, Sally."

"Her voice was very bitter when she spoke of being held a prisoner."

"I don't imagine she really meant that," Thelma said slowly. "We saw her alone at Mr. Chan's."

"Did you notice how the maid, Lotus, always lingered close by as if she had been instructed to keep watch of Li-la?"

"Yes, I observed it."

Both girls were thoughtfully silent as the car glided slowly toward the iron gate. The Chinese guard clanged it shut behind them.

"Our trip was a failure after all," Thelma remarked as Sally headed the automobile toward the main road.

"Not in my opinion. We had a most interesting afternoon."

"I don't enjoy going to a place where I am not wanted," Thelma said. "And besides, we learned nothing about the Ning-Wo emerald. Why do you suppose Li-la refused to talk about it?"

"Because she knows something that we don't," Sally responded. "Something vital and sinister. I meant to speak to her about that odd slip of yellow paper which Mr. Chan found in our library, but I lost my courage."

"The one thing which interested me more than anything else was the moon-gate door. What does Mr. Wing keep hidden in the secret room?"

"Perhaps nothing at all," Sally answered. "Or it might be a sort of chapel where the men of the house retire for religious rites."

"Chinese don't have chapels."

"Well, you know what I mean," Sally said impatiently. "A place where they pray to the joss."

"In that case, you would think that Li-la would know all about it."

"Yes," Sally agreed, "but she may have been better informed than she pretended. However, she seemed to be sincere enough."

"My, I'd like to find out what is behind that door! I should think Li-la would die of curiosity."

"We'll have to go back and do a little exploring," Sally said jokingly.

"I should say not!" retorted Thelma firmly. "I've seen quite enough of Moon-Gate estate."

During the following week many matters required the girls' attention and their adventures in connection with the Ning-Wo emerald began to slip into the background. Sally read the newspapers faithfully, but no mention ever was made that Mr. Chan's gem had been stolen or recovered. She had hoped that the Chinese merchant might call upon her father or send word regarding his progress in tracing the thief. He did neither. So far as Sally and Thelma were concerned, the affair appeared to have ended.

"We ought to be glad that we're out of it," Thelma said one afternoon as she and her friend sat on the Brandon porch. "Let the Chinese settle their own troubles."

"Just the same, we've had no fun since the day we visited Moon-Gate estate," Sally rejoined gloomily. "A little excitement gives one the taste for it."

"We might have a game of tennis," Thelma suggested half heartedly. "That ought to stir us up a bit."

"I promised Mother I'd do some shopping for her. She wants me to buy her some bridge prizes."

"Can't you give her some of your Chinese things that you bought from Mr. Chan?"

"Mother consigned most of the articles to the ash can. She gave me a list of the things I am to get. Don't you want to come along with me?"

Rather than be left at home alone, Thelma decided that she would accompany her friend on the shopping trip. Taking a bus they went directly to one of the large department stores where Sally made her selection. After the articles had been ordered sent to the Brandon residence, the girls wandered through the ready-to-wear department, admiring elaborate evening gowns which they never could buy.

On their way to the elevator, they passed close to the yard goods department. Sally suddenly clutched Thelma's arm, directing her attention toward a girl who was buying silk at one of the counters.

"Li-la Wing!" Thelma exclaimed.

"Let's go over and talk with her."

"Oh, not after the way she acted at Moon-Gate estate," Thelma protested, holding back.

Just then Li-la chanced to glance up and instantly recognized the girls. There was no mistaking the look of pleasure which crossed her face. Sally moved quickly toward her, and Thelma had no choice but to follow.

"Hello," Li-la said cheerfully. "I am buying silk for my uncle."

"You are alone?" Sally inquired.

"Oh, no, Lotus trails close at my heels as usual. But I am rid of her for a few minutes. I sent her to buy perfume."

"She seems to be a very devoted servant," Sally commented dryly.

"Devoted to my uncle—yes. She reports everything I say or do to him. If it were not for her I should attend the Lantern Festival tomorrow night."

"In Chinatown you mean?" Thelma asked.

"Yes, I have begged my uncle to allow me to go, but he refuses. I am not permitted to stir from the house save on an errand for him."

"Your uncle seems to be very strict," Sally remarked. "Your own parents are dead, Li-la?"

"Yes, for a year now I have been subject to the will of my uncle. Very soon I must marry a man of his choice."

"But that is too ridiculous," Thelma protested. "In China isn't the modern trend away from marriages arranged by parents?"

"All China may change but not my uncle. I do not wish to marry. I should like to study, and then return to China to help my people. That was the wish of my father."

"Then why can't you do it? Isn't there someone to whom you may appeal?"

"No one. My fate is decided, but I should like to have one night of gaiety before I submit. That is why

the Lantern Festival means so much to me. If only I had a way of reaching Chinatown I could slip away from Moon-Gate."

"You would dare do that?" Sally asked in amazement.

"I would dare anything. It could be managed for Lotus is a stupid creature."

"I have the use of a car," Sally said thoughtfully. Li-la's face lighted with joy.

"You will come for me?" she pleaded. She began to speak hurriedly: "Do not bring your car to the gate, but wait near the south corner of the estate by the grove. I will meet you there."

"I don't wish to offend your uncle," Sally said.

"He must never know, or I am lost! I should not have made the request—it is too much to ask."

"No, we'll be glad to come for you, only—"

Li-la did not wait for Sally to finish.

"By the south boundary at eight tomorrow night," she said hurriedly. "Go now, for Lotus is coming! We must not be seen conversing together!"

CHAPTER IX

THE CANDLE MAKER'S SHOP

SALLY and Thelma slipped into the elevator before they were observed by Li-la's servant, Lotus. Not until the two girls had reached the main floor of the department store did they venture to discuss the hasty promise.

"I didn't really mean to say I'd meet her at Moon-Gate estate," Sally declared ruefully. "She caught me up before I finished."

"You might get into trouble with Mr. Wing," Thelma replied gravely. "I don't like the idea of helping Li-la to slip away without permission."

"No, but one can't help but sympathize with her. How dreadful it would be to have no freedom!"

"Will you be able to get the car tomorrow night?"

"I think Father will let me take it. You simply must come along, for I'll not enter into this rash affair alone."

Thelma was not eager to make the trip, but she agreed to ask her parents for permission. Upon presenting the case to their elders, both girls immediately ran into opposition. It was only when Sally attempted

to contact Li-la by telephone and failed, that the objections were removed.

Eight o'clock of the following night found the girls parked in their car at the southern boundary of Moon-Gate estate. As they waited for Li-la to keep her appointment, automobile after automobile whizzed past, destined for the well-known Chinese amusement place.

"Moon-Gate seems to be busy enough in the evening," Sally remarked.

Thelma snapped on the overhead car light that she might look at her wrist watch.

"It's ten after eight," she reported. "I should think Li-la would be here if she's coming."

The girls waited another fifteen minutes and still their Chinese friend did not appear.

"I guess Li-la isn't coming," Sally said at last. "We've wasted our time."

She started the engine, intending to return to the city. But as she backed around in the narrow road, the girls heard a call from the direction of the estate.

A boyish figure poised on the iron fence. Sally and Thelma recognized Li-la as she parted the bushes and leaped to the ground. The girl had bound up her hair beneath a tight-fitting cap and wore the costume of a Chinese boy. She carried a small, pasteboard box.

"I was late in getting away," Li-la gasped as she slid into the car. "Lotus was watchful and my uncle

did not leave the house until after eight. I am so sorry to have kept you."

"It doesn't matter," Sally answered, eyeing the paste-board box curiously. "Thelma and I are in no great hurry."

"I have brought costumes for both of you," Li-la revealed, fumbling with the fastenings of her parcel. "I bought extra silk yesterday when I was in the city, and made them myself."

Sally was occupied with her driving and could give the costumes only a hasty glance, but Thelma exclaimed in admiration. The garments were similar to those worn by Li-la.

"Dressed as boys we will attract much less attention. We will be free to go anywhere."

"Thelma and I hadn't planned to take any part in the festival," Sally said slowly. "We thought we'd just wait in the car for you, and then take you home when you are ready."

"Your wait will be such a tedious one," Li-la protested. "I should like so well to have you come with me."

"It would be fun seeing Chinatown with Li-la," Thelma said eagerly. "She probably knows many places which we've never seen."

Sally did not require further urging, but she pointed out that while Li-la could easily pass for a Chinese boy, she and Thelma would have more difficulty.

"I have brought a make-up kit," Li-la smiled. "In the crowded streets you will not be noticed."

Before they reached the city, Sally parked the car, and she and Thelma donned the Chinese garments over their other clothes. Li-la altered their eyebrows with a few deft strokes of her black pencil and added other facial lines which entirely altered their appearances.

"You make very nice China boys," she said with a laugh.

Driving into the city, Sally left the car on a quiet street at the fringe of Chinatown, and the three girls then walked. At first, Thelma and Sally were self-conscious, but discovering that no one glanced in their direction, they began to enjoy themselves.

The streets were crowded with Chinese in festival robes. All along the way there were sidewalk stalls offering bags of salted plums, boxes of candied cumquats, thin slices of sugared cocoanut, and lichee nuts for sale. Doorways were ablaze with gay lanterns fashioned in the fantastic shapes of flowers, dragons, frogs and pagodas.

The girls had arrived at the quarter in time to see the Lantern procession. Led by musicians beating cymbals and tom-toms, priests and their followers moved majestically through the streets, chanting age-old songs.

When the parade had ended, Li-la took her friends

to visit the Chinese drama, and then to a restaurant for food.

Supper was served on low, six-inch tables. Sally and Thelma had never tasted so many strange dishes. They partook of chicken with red cabbage and green peppers, tenderloin of pork, fin soup, fried shrimp balls, and tiny doughnuts stuffed with chestnuts. Li-la laughed to see her friends try to use the silver handled chop sticks, and finally asked the waiter to bring forks.

"I'm afraid our disguise is worthless in a situation such as this," Sally laughed.

Once more on the street, Li-la pointed out many odd sights which the girls never would have noticed had they been alone. Learning that Sally and Thelma had never visited the Joss House, Li-la took them there.

"The temple isn't used much of late," Li-la explained. "It is maintained more for the tourists than for any other purpose."

The girls climbed a long flight of stairs to view a curious interior. Sally had more interest in the elaborate furnishings than did her companions, and she lingered behind them to examine strange figures, embroidered banners and costly furniture. When finally she looked about for Thelma and Li-la they were nowhere to be seen.

Sally wandered about the temple, and finally de-

scended the stairs to the street. Li-la and Thelma were not waiting for her there.

"Where could they have gone?" Sally thought somewhat impatiently. "I don't see why they went off and left me even if I was slow."

Thinking that the girls might be playing a joke upon her, she walked to the street corner and looked in both directions. Finally she went back to the entrance of the Joss House.

Time passed very slowly for the worried Sally. She could not believe that Thelma had deserted her. Surely if she waited a little longer, the girls would come.

"It's a mean joke to play," she thought. "I don't see why they did it."

Presently, Sally's attention was drawn to a nearby alley-way shop, that of a candle maker. The place seemed to be attracting a large number of male customers. For lack of another occupation, Sally crossed over and sauntered slowly by the dingy window. She caught a glimpse of shelves filled with festival candles carved in curious shapes.

Returning to her former post, Sally idly watched the doorway. At frequent intervals Chinamen, both alone and in pairs, entered the shop and then reappeared almost immediately. Some minutes elapsed before Sally noted a curious fact. When the men emerged

from the candle maker's shop they were not carrying packages, and so, had made no purchases.

"That's funny," she reasoned. "Why are so many persons entering that place?"

During the evening Sally had observed many strange scenes, and very likely she would have given no thought to the matter, save that as she watched, a familiar figure came into view. It was Lin.

"What is he doing in this neighborhood?" Sally asked herself. "If I remember correctly he told Mother he wanted the evening off so that he could visit a sick cousin."

She drew back into the dark recess of the doorway.

Lin walked directly to the candle maker's shop and disappeared inside. In a few minutes he reappeared, and without glancing across the street, walked rapidly away.

"Lin didn't buy any candles either," Sally thought. "Surely there is something queer going on in that little hole-in-the-wall shop."

The girl knew that it would not be wise to investigate, yet curiosity overcame her judgment. Again she crossed the street, and taking her position near the doorway, leaned against the wall with the air of a loungee.

Several Chinamen came down the street, and paying not the slightest heed to Sally, they entered the shop. Turning her head, she was able to watch their move-

ments. They talked with the old candle maker in Chinese and one of the men laid a sum of money on the counter. Sally gathered that it was not a large enough amount, for an argument ensued. In the end, the newcomers paid an additional amount to the old man, and went away, complaining angrily.

A few minutes later the same scene with only a slight variation, was repeated by another group of customers. The men did not buy candles or take anything away from the shop.

"They're being forced to contribute to some cause and they don't like it," Sally decided. "I'll ask Lin all about it tomorrow but of course he'll not answer any of my questions."

When another group of Chinamen entered the shop, she daringly followed. The old candle maker, surrounded by bowls of bright colored paint and pots of hot tallow, left his stool and came to talk with the newcomers. He glanced sharply at Sally but lost interest in her as she turned her back and pretended to examine some of the gold-splashed candles.

Again she heard the clink of coins as money changed hands. From beneath a counter, the candle maker removed a large purse, made to resemble the head of a blue dragon. Into this he poured the coins.

Sally slipped out of the shop ahead of the group of Chinamen. While they went on down the street, she loitered near the doorway—not because she hoped to

observe more, but for the reason that she could not make up her mind where to go.

As she debated whether or not to abandon her search for Li-la and Thelma, a heavy-set man halted by the candle-maker's shop. He was coarse looking, white, and walked like a sailor although he wore no uniform.

The man stood peering in the window for a moment. Then he glanced sharply at Sally who was thankful that the doorway cast a shadow across her face.

After a brief inspection of the premises, the man strode into the shop.

"Well, Hop Lee, is the money ready for me?" he asked brusquely.

Sally did not hear the candle maker's reply, but she saw the Chinese take the blue dragon purse from under the counter. He poured all of the money into the sailor's hands.

"You're sixty dollars short, Hop Lee!" the man announced when he had finished counting the coins. "Come on with the rest!"

"We can raise no more," the candle maker answered.

"Then you can't expect me to go through with our agreement. I'm taking too much risk anyhow for what I'll get out of it."

The Chinaman eyed his visitor appraisingly. Perhaps knowing the man's weakness for gold, he moved

his hand as if to sweep the money back into the blue dragon purse.

"Oh, well, if that's all you can raise, it will have to do," the other said quickly. "But I don't like this business."

"You have your orders," said the candle maker in silken tones. "Is your boat ready to sail?"

"At an hour's notice. Where do you want the *White Lady* anchored?"

"You will await word from us and then at the appointed night lie in wait in the bay three miles from Moon-Gate estate."

"You know where to reach me," the man answered gruffly. "I'll be ready whenever you say."

Pocketing the money, he walked from the shop, and was lost in the shadows.

CHAPTER X

A BLUE DRAGON PURSE

SALLY was deeply disturbed by the conversation she had heard. She could not imagine why the sea captain who owned the *White Lady* should be employed to anchor his boat near Moon-Gate estate. A group of Chinamen headed by the candle maker, had paid him a large sum of money. She had observed that many who made donations were poor and their gifts were unwillingly given.

"Can Li-la or her uncle have anything to do with this strange affair?" she speculated. "And why is Lin mixed up in it?"

Sally felt a great deal of affection for the Chinese servant. He plagued her at times, but she did not wish to see him come to grief with the law. Li-la too she liked and wished to trust. For the first time it occurred to her that friendship with the girl might not only be unwise but actually dangerous.

Sally moved away from the candle maker's shop and revisited the Joss House to be certain that Thelma and Li-la were not waiting for her there. Deciding

that it was useless to search longer, she retraced her way to the parked car. When she was close by she heard her name called.

"Do hurry up, slow poke," Thelma pleaded wearily. "We've been standing here for hours. We can't get into the car."

Sally quickly unlocked the doors.

"Where have you been?" Thelma asked as she collapsed against the cushion. "It's after eleven o'clock."

"Where have I been—well I like that! I've been searching for you half the night!"

"Have you really?" Thelma inquired contritely. "Oh, we're terribly sorry."

"I was quite provoked when you went off and left me alone in the temple."

"We only crossed the street for a moment to buy some lily bulbs," Thelma explained. "It was all my fault. I told Li-la I wanted to take some home to Mother and she said I could get them at a little shop directly opposite the Joss House."

"You might have told me you were going."

"We thought we did. You were busy looking at something, but we thought you heard when we called to say we'd be back in a minute."

"But you never did return," Sally said, softening a bit.

"When we came back, you were gone. So there was nothing more to do but return here."

"You surely didn't remain at the Joss House all this time?" Li-la inquired.

"I stood out in front of the building nearly all of the time. I did wander around the block."

"That's probably how we missed you," Thelma said. "It's a relief you're back safe and sound. If you'll forgive us, no harm has been done."

"Consider yourselves forgiven then," Sally replied lightly.

"I feel so much to blame," Li-la said self-accusingly. "You had such an unpleasant time."

"Oh, no, I became interested in a little alley shop—that of a candle maker." As she spoke, Sally watched Li-la narrowly, but the girl's expression did not change.

"The hour is late," Li-la said. "Unless I reach Moon-Gate before midnight I fear my uncle may be at home."

"It won't take us long to get there," Sally assured her, starting the car.

During the ride through the city she was so quiet that both Li-la and Thelma decided she had not forgiven them. Actually, Sally had dismissed the incident from her mind. She could not forget so easily the scene she had witnessed in the candle maker's shop, nor could she bring herself to reveal her knowledge to Li-la. She had decided to say nothing of the adventure until she and Thelma were alone.

Sally's mood seemed contagious, for as the automobile sped along the bay road, both Li-la and Thelma became depressed. It was not until they were nearing Moon-Gate estate that Li-la said:

"I had such a delightful evening, thanks to you girls. This night will linger always in my memory."

"We'll come out to the estate and take you for other rides if you wish," Sally offered.

Li-la shook her head. "No, I gave myself this one night of freedom. From now on I must be obedient to the wishes of my uncle."

"But we'll see you again," Thelma said.

Li-la did not reply. A few minutes later she requested Sally to stop the car some distance from the main gate.

"You'll be able to go on from here alone?" Sally questioned.

"Yes, if you will help me over the barrier."

The girls assisted Li-la to climb the fence. She thanked them once more for their aid, and then darted away through the trees.

Sally and Thelma were returning to the car when the latter suddenly halted. She glanced back over her shoulder, whispering nervously:

"What was that sound?"

"I heard nothing."

"It seemed to me as if someone were hiding in the bushes just inside the estate!"

"You must have imagined it, Sally."

"Perhaps I did. I certainly hope Li-la gets back to the house without being seen."

The girls remained where they were for a few minutes, and then satisfied that no one had been watching, drove toward the city.

Enroute home, Sally spoke of the blue dragon purse and revealed all that she had seen and heard at the candle maker's shop.

"Are you certain that the seaman said he would anchor his boat near Moon-Gate?" Thelma asked in amazement.

"Yes, I heard the name distinctly. That was why I said nothing about my adventure to Li-la."

"You believe then that she is mixed up in some underhanded business?"

"I don't know what I think, Thelma. I like Li-la very much, but I can't forget the strange way she acted about Mr. Chan's emerald."

"Of course, anyone would have a right to anchor a boat off Moon-Gate estate," Thelma said slowly. "Li-la might have nothing to do with the affair."

"That is true."

"Why is the boat to be anchored at that particular place?"

"I didn't learn, but from the general character of the conversation I assumed the business wasn't a very honorable one."

"And you say Lin is mixed up in it too?"

"All I know is that he entered the shop. I judge that he brought money as the others did, but I have no way of proving it."

"Why don't you question Lin."

"Oh, I shall," Sally replied, "but I'll only waste my breath. Lin's private life is his own."

The girls had reached their own neighborhood. Sally dropped Thelma off and then turned into the Brandon driveway. As she was closing the garage doors, her father came out to meet her.

"You are late, Sally. We were beginning to worry."

"I'm sorry, Father," Sally apologized, "but as usual quite a few things seemed to happen to me. By the way, is Lin home?"

"Lin? Yes, I heard him come in an hour ago. He is very much disturbed about his cousin."

"I don't believe Lin even saw a cousin! Do you know where I encountered him tonight?"

Sally then repeated the story which she had related to Thelma. Mr. Brandon whistled softly at mention of the seaman who owned the *White Lady*.

"That ship is familiar to me, Sally. At least I recall the name, although I can't seem to remember the connection."

"Would it be possible to learn who owns the vessel?" Sally inquired eagerly.

"Oh, yes, that would be comparatively simple."

"Then will you make a few inquiries? I'm very curious to learn the identity of the man who talked with Hop Lee."

"I'll find out for you," Mr. Brandon promised. "And when I do, we may make a little trip to the police station."

"You suspect smuggling?"

"If you reported the scene accurately, that would be my interpretation."

"Why should so many poor Chinamen be mixed up in such an enterprise? They were forced to contribute money."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, I could not have been mistaken. And Lin went to the candle maker's shop too."

"Lin is becoming something of a problem," Mr. Brandon said with a sigh. "Unless he settles down and lives a more refined life, I fear we'll have to let him go."

The following morning the ship builder had a long talk with the Chinaman, but as Sally expected, he met all questions with blank stares or elaborate explanations which explained nothing. Lin declared that he had spent the entire evening with his sick cousin and had taken no part in the Lantern Festival. He did not know Hop Lee, the candle maker.

Lin glided about the house, apparently oblivious that anyone regarded him with suspicion. If anything

he was more attentive to his duties than usual. He polished the floors until they shone; he arranged fresh flowers in all the vases. In dusting he was careful to include the legs as well as the top surface of all the furniture.

"Lin acts as innocent as a babe," Sally thought as she watched him at his work. "That's why I'm certain he isn't!"

Three days elapsed and both Thelma and Sally found them somewhat tedious. There was no school to occupy their time. Mr. Brandon had gone up the coast on a business trip, and during his absence no progress could be made in gleaning information concerning the mysterious *White Lady*. The girls spent hours discussing the subject, pondering upon Li-la's knowledge of the blue dragon purse.

"I wish now I'd told her exactly what I learned," Sally said regretfully. "As it is we'll discover nothing more."

"We might drive out there again."

"And Mr. Wing would be apt to refuse us admittance to the house. I have a better idea!"

"What?"

"Let's write her a formal note, inviting her to take tea with us and attend a matinee. How does that strike you?"

"We might try it," Thelma answered doubtfully. "However, her uncle may keep the note from her."

An hour was spent composing the invitation. It was dispatched on the morning mail, and the following afternoon Li-la's reply came back. Sally ran with the letter to Thelma's house and they opened it together. As they scanned the brief paragraph, their faces fell.

"She's not coming," Sally said in disappointment.

"The note is so curt too," Thelma added. "After we went to so much trouble for her, wouldn't you think she could have given some reason for declining?"

"It's probably on account of her uncle. We shouldn't have written."

"Mr. Wing has no right to keep her shut up at the estate," Thelma said indignantly. "I wish we could do something about it."

"So do I," Sally agreed, "but I'm afraid the situation is hopeless."

The girls went to the movie alone, and it was late when they returned to their homes. Sally met Lin coming up the Brandon walk, his arms laden with groceries. She opened the kitchen door for him and saved a sack of oranges which was in danger of falling.

Lin dropped the packages on the kitchen table and removed his light overcoat. As he hung it on a peg, a slip of yellow paper fluttered to the floor.

Lin shot a quick glance at Sally. She had noticed the paper, and recognized it as a slip similar to the

one which Mr. Chan had picked up in the library.

"Where did you get that, Lin?" she asked sharply.

"Only paper to make grocery-food list," Lin answered.

Before Sally could pick up the yellow slip he returned it to his suit pocket.

"Let me see the slip, please," Sally commanded.

She thought that the Chinaman intended to refuse, but after a slight battle with himself, he handed over the incriminating evidence. It was a piece of perfectly plain yellow rice paper. Sally could not be positive that the slip was identical with the one left by the thief who had stolen Mr. Chan's emerald, but she believed it to be the same.

"Lin, are you quite certain you know nothing of Mr. Chan's Buddha?" she questioned severely. "If you tell the truth, I'll try to help you."

"Me no tell-lie boy," Lin replied, apparently unruffled. "Me say honesty policy is best. If honorable Chan lose emerald me feel velly bad."

With a sigh, Sally went away. Lin baffled her by his amazing ability to side-slip a difficult situation. She confidently believed that he could explain the mysterious disappearance of the emerald if he chose. Lin would never betray himself even if the alternative were dismissal from the household where he had served so faithfully.

"That piece of yellow paper found in the library

must have a particular significance," Sally reflected. "Mr. Chan knew what it meant and so does Lin."

She considered calling upon the Chinese merchant again, but hesitated to do so lest he think she was interesting herself too deeply in his affairs. While Sally deliberated, a car rolled up the driveway. Mr. Brandon had returned from his trip.

Before Sally or her mother could reach the door, Lin ran out to carry in Mr. Brandon's suitcase.

"Velly glad you get home," the servant beamed. "You have nice trip?"

While Lin always was civil, Sally was slightly amused at this outburst of beaming servility. After the Chinaman had gone, the ship builder carefully closed the living room doors.

"I have a little information for you, Sally," he said when the greeting had been completed. "You'll be glad to hear that I have learned the name of the man who owns the *White Lady*."

CHAPTER XI

THE LIGHTED WINDOW

"THE *White Lady* is a small freight vessel," Mr. Brandon continued as Sally waited expectantly, "and the owner—Jake Hammil."

"Did you learn anything about him, Father?"

"His reputation is decidedly bad. Hammil lost his place with a regular steamship company several years ago because of his brutality in handling crews. Somehow he raked together enough money to buy this boat, and since then he has appeared to prosper."

"How does he make his money?"

"He was suspected of transporting Chinese coolies to this country illegally. The police arrested him but nothing ever came of it and he was released. However, Hammil may not be the man you saw."

"Can you describe him, Father?"

"I never saw the man myself. From his picture I'd say that he was about fifty years old, square-faced, and rather heavy set. Dark hair and eyes."

"I'm sure he was the one I saw," Sally declared. "I never dreamed that Hop Lee was arranging to bring coolies into this country illegally."

"That may not be it at all, Sally," her father re-

sponded. "Some persons say Hammil will turn his hand to anything which brings in good money."

"From the conversation which I overheard, I assumed that the *White Lady* might be sailing from Moon-Gate point, rather than the other way around."

"Oh, there's no reason for us to think that Hammil is violating the Immigration laws now," Mr. Brandon replied quickly. "By this time he may have taken up a more lucrative business."

"It's a dishonest one—I'm fairly certain of that."

Possessed with the information supplied by her father, Sally was more eager than ever to talk with Li-la. Considering Mr. Wing's unfriendly attitude and the curt note received from the Chinese girl, she did not feel like calling at the estate. Yet unless she summoned sufficient courage to go there without an invitation, she doubted that she would see Li-la again.

Mrs. Brandon had grave doubts that it would be wise to allow Sally to visit Moon-Gate again. Knowing that her daughter had set her heart upon the journey, she offered a counter plan.

"Why couldn't we make up a little party some evening and take guests out there for a chop suey dinner?"

"But Mother," Sally protested, "if there were other folks along I'd not have an opportunity to talk with Li-la."

"Then just the four of us if you prefer—Thelma, your father and I."

"That would be much better," Sally approved. "Only I'm not sure we'll be able to get inside the grounds without admittance cards."

"Your father should be able to arrange that," Mrs. Brandon replied confidently. "After all, I understand that Moon-Gate is operated for profit, so it's unlikely that paying guests will be turned away. We might make the trip tomorrow evening."

Sally ran next door to invite Thelma. Immediately the girls began to plan just what they would say to Li-la if they were successful in contacting her at the estate.

Mr. Brandon sought Lin's aid in securing cards of admission to the grounds. When the Chinaman said that he could not obtain them, the ship builder had no trouble in obtaining them from a business associate who in turn had secured the tickets by applying to his Chinese laundryman.

"It's queer that Lin couldn't help us out," Mrs. Brandon commented. "So far as I can learn, nearly every Chinaman in San Francisco has an ample supply to peddle."

At seven o'clock the following evening Thelma presented herself at the Brandon home ready for the trip. Sally's mother was adjusting her hat in front of the mirror when the doorbell rang.

"Oh, it's Mr. and Mrs. Hubert!" Sally exclaimed in dismay, peered out the window. "They'll want to play

bridge and stay for hours. Why did they have to come this particular night?"

"Sally!" her mother reproved sternly. She quickly removed her hat. "We'll have to forget about Moon-Gate estate for tonight."

"We had planned on it so! Thelma stayed home from a moving picture show on purpose to make the trip. The admission cards won't be good tomorrow night either."

"We might invite the Huberts to go with us," Mrs. Brandon said doubtfully. "However, it would seem rather rude to hurry them away from here, and I know they dislike places on the order of Moon-Gate."

"Why not let the girls go by themselves," Mr. Brandon urged. "They're old enough to keep out of mischief."

"Oh, very well," Mrs. Brandon consented reluctantly. "But remember, Sally, you must be home by ten o'clock."

"We'll make it easily by that time," Sally promised gaily.

The girls hurried joyfully away just an instant before Lin escorted the visitors into the living room.

"I'm glad our outing wasn't cancelled," Thelma declared as they drove away in the Brandon car, "but I don't like the idea of going to Moon-Gate alone at night. I wish we had some older person along."

"Oh, we'll have no trouble," Sally said confidently.

Approaching Moon-Gate estate some minutes later, the girls observed that many cars had turned down the private road. Through the trees they glimpsed pastel colored neon lights and gay swinging lanterns.

"Things seem to be humming here tonight," observed Thelma. "Mr. Wing must make a great deal of money."

"He probably does. I hope we have no difficulty getting into the grounds."

The Chinaman on guard at the gate gave no more than a casual glance at the girls' cards of admission, indicating that they were to drive through. He did not seem to remember them from their previous visit.

The parking enclosure was crowded with cars and many person in evening dress were taking the path leading to the restaurant. Concessions were operating and the grounds had assumed a festive, carnival-like atmosphere.

"I don't know how Li-la will receive us," Sally said doubtfully as the girls presented themselves at the Wing house. "We weren't invited to come again."

"This is a little late to be thinking about it!"

Soon the door was opened by Lotus who frowned upon recognizing the young visitors. When Sally asked if they might see Li-la, she was told that the girl was not at home. Then the door closed gently but effectively in their faces.

"Well, so much for that," Thelma sighed. "What shall we do now?"

"It's too early to go home. We might take a ride on the lake."

Sally indicated a group of dragon boats tied up along the shore. They were long and narrow with high prows made to resemble the snarling or laughing mouth of a sea beast. The body of the craft was painted with phosphorescent scales which glowed in the darkness. Across the lake stretched long lines of dancing lanterns.

"Yes, it would be fun to take a boat ride," Thelma agreed. "I suppose it will be frightfully expensive though, for this place is high priced."

Upon investigation they found that the lake ride would not be beyond reach of their pocketbooks. The boat tilted precariously as the girls seated themselves, but after the Chinaman had pushed off, it glided at an even keel. From shore came the strains of a Chinese orchestra, while another dragon boat passed close by, with musicians playing a moon fiddle, a sam yin and a gong.

For a time Sally and Thelma were content to lean back against the cushions, enjoying the beauty of the colored lights which cast weird reflections over the dark water. In vain they tried to draw their boatman into conversation. He had nothing to say.

"One gains an excellent view of the Wing house

from here," Thelma remarked casually as the boat floated farther out into the lake.

Sally turned to look toward shore.

"Why, Thelma, isn't there a light in Li-la's window?"

"I couldn't tell this far away."

"I'm almost positive her room is in that part of the house, Thelma. Perhaps she is at home after all!"

Curtains had not been drawn across the window, and as the girls watched, they noticed someone moving about in the room. For a time they could not be certain who it was. Then they knew that it was Li-la Wing for she turned and walked toward the window.

"It is she!" Thelma exclaimed. "And Lotus just told us Li-la wasn't there!"

"Our message never was delivered, you may be sure of that."

As the dragon boat drifted slowly along amid floating lily pads, the girls kept watch of the lighted window. For some minutes Li-la stood there gazing out across the lake, then she drew the blinds.

"Do you suppose she saw us?" Thelma asked.

Sally shook her head. "From here it looked exactly as if she were gazing toward us, but one can see nothing from a lighted room."

"I wish we could let her know that we are here."

"So do I."

Sally gazed thoughtfully at the Chinese boatman.

He had been listening intently to the conversation. She was convinced that he understood perfectly.

"Boatman," she said abruptly, "how would you like to earn an extra dollar?"

The Chinaman's face wrinkled into folds of delight. He gave a short sound which Sally interpreted as assent.

"I thought you understood English," she said with satisfaction. "I wish you to deliver a note to Li-la Wing. If you do that I will pay you a dollar."

The boatman gazed for a moment toward the Wing house as he rested on his long oars.

"Well?" Sally inquired impatiently.

"Give me the money."

"You shall receive your pay after you have delivered the message," Sally replied. "You must give it to no one except Li-la Wing. Do you know her?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll write the note now."

Thelma had a pencil in her pocketbook and Sally found in her own possession a blank envelope which served for paper. The girls composed a discrete message, informing Li-la that they were waiting by the lake and would like to talk with her if she were free to see them.

When the boat reached shore, Sally gave the message to the Chinaman, instructing him again exactly what he was to do.

"If there is an answer, I'll pay you two dollars instead of one," she promised. "We'll wait here by the boat until you return."

The Chinaman nodded and moved away into the darkness. Sally and Thelma saw him approach the Wing house by a side door.

"I wonder why he didn't go around to the front?" Thelma speculated.

"I guess he knows better than we how to get in," Sally responded. "I'm sure he didn't even knock."

"That's funny," Thelma observed as they saw the man vanish into the house. "Maybe our boatman is a good friend of Mr. Wing! Wouldn't that be a joke on us!"

"He'd deliver the message to Mr. Wing instead of to Li-la. We should have thought of such a possibility."

Anxiously, the girls kept watch of the house. Fifteen minutes elapsed and the Chinaman did not return. Sally and Thelma were confident he had not left by either the front or side doors.

"What became of him?" Thelma fretted.

"He'll be here in a minute or so. Li-la may be composing an answer."

Nervously, the girls began to pace up and down along the shore. Although they kept close watch of the house, the boatman did not emerge.

"I don't see why he'd stay in there so long," Sally said. "Perhaps he slipped out a rear door."

"One would think he'd come back to claim his money."

"Yes," Sally agreed, "I can't understand why he doesn't return."

Although no one emerged from the door, the girls noticed that at intervals other Chinamen entered the Wing house.

"We've seen at least a dozen men go inside," Sally remarked in a puzzled tone. "There's something queer about it."

"There's something weird about this entire place," Thelma said with a shiver. "Let's go home. It's evident that if Li-la received our note she doesn't intend to answer."

"I don't think she ever got it, Thelma. Somehow I have a feeling that Li-la is in trouble."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, it's just a feeling—but I wish we could talk with her tonight. This will be our one and only opportunity."

"If we can't get word to her, there's nothing more we can do."

"We could easily enter the house by using the side door. It isn't guarded."

"You mean—break in?" Thelma demanded anxiously.

"We'd not be breaking in exactly. The door appears to be a semi-private entrance. Everyone uses it."

Thelma demurred, but in the end Sally persuaded her that they really should make an effort to see Li-la. Waiting until no one was close by, the girls moved toward the side door of the Wing house. It stood slightly ajar as if in open invitation for them to enter.

"I don't like this a bit," Thelma whispered in protest. "We'll be sure to meet Lotus or Mr. Wing!"

"Oh, come on," Sally urged. "I don't think we're doing anything very wrong, for after all Moon-Gate is almost a public place."

"This house isn't," Thelma murmured. "And furthermore, Mr. Wing doesn't want us to see Li-la."

"You wait here then and I'll go alone. I must talk with her, for it's our only chance."

Thelma would not permit Sally to enter the house by herself. Conquering her fear, she allowed herself to be led into a long tiled corridor. It was deserted and for a moment Sally did not know which way to go.

"Li-la's room is down this direction," she decided finally. "Oh, yes, now I have my bearings."

The girls tiptoed along the hallway, meeting no one. Coming to Li-la's apartment they found the door closed.

Sally hesitated briefly and then tapped lightly on the panel. There was no answer.

"I am certain this is the right door," Sally said in perplexity. "Li-la was in her room a short time ago too."

She knocked again, louder than before.

"I think the room is dark now," Thelma whispered. "Otherwise we'd be able to see a crack of light on the threshold."

"Li-la doesn't seem to be here," Sally admitted reluctantly. "Perhaps she received our note and is down by the lake waiting for us."

"We know she didn't leave the house. She must be here somewhere, but in this maze of rooms we'll never find her."

"The best thing to do is to get out before Mr. Wing discovers us," Sally agreed. "Shall we leave a note?"

"Someone else might find it. Let's just slip away."

Reluctantly, Sally turned from the door. She had risked a great deal in order to see Li-la and she did not like to go away without accomplishing her mission.

As the girls were tiptoeing along the hall, their attention was drawn to a fan-shaped doorway covered with a blue velvet hanging. They had failed to notice it before, and Li-la had not taken them into the room beyond.

Involuntarily, both girls stopped to stare at it. The velvet hangings had parted a trifle, so that they caught a glimpse of a tiny green light burning on an altar. The air was heavy with incense.

"It must be a chapel," Sally whispered, and before Thelma could prevent her from doing it, she parted the velvet hangings.

"Oh, Sally!" Thelma gasped, shocked by her companion's daring. Yet the sight beyond was so fascinating that she made no move to draw away.

The girls were gazing into a long, narrow room with a gold altar at the far end. A large, ugly image occupied the central position, and before it were eight mystic Buddhist symbols. In a niche beneath the carved figure lay several burning incense sticks.

"Mr. Wing must retire to this room when he wishes to pray to heathen Gods," Thelma whispered in awe.

The chamber oppressed her and she tugged at her companion's hand. Instead of retreating, Sally stepped through the doorway.

"Sally!" Thelma remonstrated severely. "We've done entirely too much prying. We have no right to be here. After all this is a private home."

"Sometimes a person loses his right to privacy," Sally replied in a strange, tense voice.

Thelma regarded her with surprise. Sally's face had become grim and her gaze was fastened upon a little figure which stood on a rosewood table near the altar.

"Unless I am very much mistaken," Sally said quietly, "we have found Mr. Chan's Buddha."

CHAPTER XII

A ROOM OF MYSTERY

"OH, THE Buddha couldn't belong to Mr. Chan!" Thelma gasped, in her excitement forgetting to speak softly. "How would it get here?"

Sally did not answer. She moved forward and removed the figure from the rosewood table.

"It does look the same," Thelma admitted reluctantly, "but there must be many others like it."

"None with a hiding place inside I should imagine."

Sally turned over the figure, disclosing a faint line visible on its base. No longer could either of them doubt that the Buddha was the same one which had been stolen from Mr. Chan, for they felt certain that the removable bottom was a unique feature of the merchant's idol. How had the figure come into Mr. Wing's possession?

"Let's take the emerald and go," Thelma urged nervously. "If we should be found here this discovery would cost us dearly."

Even Sally had lost her assurance. Her fingers were stiff and awkward as she tried to remove the plug from the figure. It came off but when she held the Buddha upside down and shook it nothing dropped out.

"The emerald is gone, Thelma! We might have known it would be."

"How did the Buddha ever get here? Li-la—"

"It begins to look that way," Sally answered grimly. "Now that we think back, she acted queerly from the very start."

"She was at Mr. Chan's shop the day of the auction sale," Thelma recalled, "and she learned from us that the emerald had been hidden in the Buddha. But Li-la is so nice it doesn't seem possible she could be a thief!"

"I never entirely trusted her, even if I did enjoy her company. Do you remember how frightened she appeared that day when we called to see her?"

"Yes, I do, Sally. Li-la acted as if she were afraid we'd accuse her of something."

"And when we didn't she relaxed and became very friendly. But she refused to discuss the subject of the emerald."

"We've been terribly blind," Thelma admitted ruefully. "She played upon our sympathies by pretending that her uncle was cruel to her."

"I think she was telling us the truth about that part. If not, Li-la is a wonderful actress. I admit I was taken in. Even now with the evidence right here in my hand, it's hard for me to believe she'd do such a thing."

"There's a chance she's not guilty."

"A very slim one, Thelma."

"Some other member of Mr. Wing's household

might have stolen the Buddha," Thelma argued. "You remember we were accosted in the alley by two Chinese who obviously were after our box."

"Yes, that is true."

"And the Buddha actually was taken from your library, not from Mr. Chan's shop."

"I see your point," Sally said slowly. "You don't believe that Li-la followed us home. You think it was some other person."

"Haven't we been blaming Lin for the theft?"

"Yes," Sally admitted ruefully, "and I fear I've done him a grievous wrong. Oh, dear, things are so mixed up now that my head is a whirlwind!"

"Let's leave this house before anyone finds us here," Thelma urged again.

"We must take the Buddha with us and turn it over to Mr. Chan. That is plainly our duty."

Sally cast a regretful glance about the room as the girls hurried toward the fan door. She wished that she dare remain a few minutes longer and make a careful search for the missing emerald. It was barely possible that the gem had been secreted somewhere near the altar.

The girls had reached the doorway. Suddenly Thelma gripped Sally's hand tightly and whispered tensely:

"Listen!"

They could hear someone approaching.

"Steady," Sally said encouragingly for she could see that Thelma, frightened half out of her wits, was on the verge of hysteria. "It's probably only a servant."

The soft thud-thud of slippers came closer and closer. While Thelma crouched against the wall, Sally peeped out through the velvet curtains guarding the doorway.

Mr. Wing, dressed in ceremonial robes, walked with measured tread down the hall. A conviction that he meant to enter the chapel seized Sally. In panic she looked about for a hiding place.

"We're lost," Thelma moaned under her breath. "Mr. Wing will discover the Buddha is gone, and then what will become of us?"

Sally's first act was to dart noiselessly back to the rosewood table. She replaced the golden figure in exactly the position she had found it. The only hiding place available for the girls was behind the altar, and neither had any confidence that it was a safe one.

Scarcely had they crouched down out of sight when Mr. Wing appeared in the doorway. He placed a new stick of incense in the burner by the altar and spoke a few words in Chinese.

Sally and Thelma began to breathe naturally again, for apparently Mr. Wing had observed nothing amiss. Instead of leaving quickly as they hoped he would do, the Chinese beat three times upon a brass gong.

When a servant appeared, Mr. Wing spoke rapidly

in Chinese. Sally and Thelma guessed that the conversation concerned Li-la for they heard her name spoken several times.

Mr. Wing waited until the servant had gone away. Then from their hiding place the girls heard him walk toward the east wall. A faint clicking sound reached their ears, then all was quiet.

For a long time the girls crouched behind the altar, afraid to move. They were certain that Mr. Wing had not departed, and yet they were puzzled because they could hear no sound.

At last curiosity overcame prudence and Sally raised up and peeped over the edge of the altar. The room was deserted.

"It's all right now," she whispered to Thelma.

As the girls stood upright, they both stared in amazement. It was clear now where Mr. Wing had gone. He had opened a secret panel in the east wall and had passed through into an adjoining room without bothering to close the section behind him.

"That explains the clicking sound we heard," Sally whispered in awe.

To reach the door the girls were compelled to pass in front of the open panel. They moved cautiously, fearing that a sound might betray them to Mr. Wing.

Sally caught a glimpse of the adjoining room as they slipped past the panel, and was amazed because she

recognized the large chamber with the moon-gate door at its far end. She had not imagined that the chapel was so close.

"I don't believe Mr. Wing is anywhere around," she communicated to Thelma.

Sally confirmed her belief by rashly peering through the panel. The room was deserted.

"Now where did Mr. Wing disappear to so quickly?" she speculated, half aloud. "Evidently he intends to return presently through this panel or he'd not have left it open."

"Come on," Thelma urged nervously. "This is our chance to get away."

"Do you know what I think?"

At that particular moment Thelma had not the slightest interest in her companion's opinion upon any subject. Her sole thought was to escape from the house before they encountered more trouble.

While Sally daringly lingered by the open panel, staring into the chamber room with thoughtful eyes, Thelma ran to the rosewood table. She snatched up the golden Buddha and secreted it in her clothing. Poised for flight she cast an anguished glance at her chum.

"Oh, Sally, I beg of you—there is no time to delay!" Sally was provokingly calm.

"Do you know what I think?" she asked, resuming

the conversation at exactly the point where it had been broken off. "Mr. Wing must have disappeared through the moon-gate door! Let's stay here long enough to discover what goes on in that mysterious room beyond."

CHAPTER XIII

BEYOND THE MOON-GATE

"SALLY, have you lost your senses?" Thelma gasped, regarding her chum incredulously. "Do you want to be caught in this house?"

"Not particularly," Sally grinned. "I don't expect to be either. This altar makes a perfect hiding place. We could stay here for awhile and perhaps gather evidence useful to Mr. Chan."

"Mr. Chan can gather his own evidence," Thelma returned grimly. She tugged at Sally's hand, and the girl allowed herself to be pulled toward the door.

There, both halted in consternation. A Chinaman was coming down the hall toward them.

"Back to our hiding place!" Sally commanded tersely.

Barely had the girls crouched down behind the altar when the man entered. Thelma's heart beat faster, for she was afraid that the newcomer might notice the absence of the golden Buddha from the rosewood table. He did not even glance in that direction.

The Chinaman passed through the open panel, vanishing into the adjoining chamber. Sally waited a

moment, and then stole to a position from which she could watch the moon-gate door.

She saw a portion of one of the cherry blossom panels open, and from the small peep-hole, a face peered out.

The Chinaman offered for inspection a curious object in his hand. The peep-hole closed. There was a brief wait, and then the circular moon-gate door slowly moved sideways. The Chinaman entered and the portal slid back into position.

Thelma had crept to her chum's side.

"What was it that the man showed to the guard?" she whispered in awe.

"I couldn't be sure. I thought it was a yellow slip of paper."

"Like the one Mr. Chan found in your library?"

"Yes."

"What do you suppose is happening beyond that door?"

"I don't know, but I suspect that all of the men we saw enter the house must have gone in there."

"Maybe they're having a tong meeting."

Sally did not answer for again she heard approaching footsteps. She drew Thelma back into their hiding place, and a moment later a heavy-set man entered the room.

"A white man," Thelma whispered in amazement.

Sally suffered a greater shock than her friend, for

she recognized the man as the same person she had seen at the candle maker's shop. Undoubtedly, he was Jake Hammil, owner of the *White Lady*.

The man stood staring at the altar for a moment, and the girls had an uncomfortable sensation. It seemed as if he must be looking directly at them. However, the seaman was only interested in the structure itself.

He stood uncertainly gazing at the open panel, and finally walked through to the room beyond. As he approached the moon-gate door, it slid sideways. Hammil entered without showing any token of identification.

"Mr. Wing has been expecting him," Sally whispered. "Oh, this is no ordinary tong meeting. There is some queer business going on in that room beyond the moon-gate door, and it concerns Jack Hammil and his ship, the *White Lady*."

"Was that man the one you saw at the candlemaker's shop?"

"Yes, I'd recognize him a mile away. He accepted money from Hop Lee and in return promised to have his vessel ready for use at an appointed hour."

"Mr. Wing knows something of the affair you think?"

"Obviously. Why otherwise would Hammil venture here? Some deep-rooted plot is being cooked up."

"It's a case for the police, not for us," Thelma said with a shudder. "How we got ourselves mixed up in

this affair I'm sure I don't know. But I'm certain of one thing. I'm clearing out of here while I can. If you insist upon staying, you stay alone!"

"Oh, I'm anxious to get away myself now. We've learned all we can."

The girls tiptoed to the door and looked cautiously up and down the corridor. No one was in sight.

"I think it's safe now," Sally whispered. "Move quietly."

Hand in hand they darted noiselessly down the hall. Reaching the side door where they had entered a short time before, Sally peered anxiously about. So far as she could see no one was in the vicinity.

"The coast is clear, Thelma."

A great weight fell from them as they emerged into the cool night air.

"Well, we're safe outside again, and nothing so very dreadful happened," Sally chuckled softly.

"We're not away from the estate yet."

"Oh, we'll have no difficulty now. No one saw us enter or leave the house."

"We were just lucky, that's all," Thelma declared. "I'll be happy when we get back home, and unless I weaken you'll never drag me into another affair like this."

"I don't care to be involved in one myself," Sally answered gravely.

"Oh, no! You simply love it!"

Sally shook her head. "I feel rather sick about it all. I liked Li-la so much and now the way she has turned out!"

"So far we haven't any real evidence against her except her peculiar actions."

"She is the niece of Mr. Wing, and he is involved with Jake Hammil."

"Will you go to the police, Sally?"

"I haven't thought that far. I'd hate to see Li-la arrested unless I had absolute proof of her guilt. I believe she must have stolen the emerald or knew who did it, but seemingly I was mistaken about Lin, and I might be wrong this time."

"We could talk with Mr. Chan," Thelma said slowly.

"That probably would be the best way," Sally agreed. "We'll give him the Buddha and make certain that it really does belong to him. There might be two figures constructed exactly alike, although it doesn't seem possible."

The girls were thoughtfully silent as they slowly walked toward the parking enclosure. From the direction of the restaurant pagoda they could hear gay music and couples could be seen gliding past the windows. The carnival was in full swing, but Sally and Thelma had lost their desire to join in the gaiety.

The path leading to the parking space was dark and

deserted. As the girls walked hurriedly along, their eyes upon the ground, a Chinaman suddenly appeared before them. He stepped boldly out from behind the bushes and barred their way.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FORTUNE WHEEL

THELMA stifled a scream. She did not feel reassured because the man wore a colorful Chinese robe which marked him as one of the employees of the Moon-Gate estate.

"What do you want?" Sally inquired sharply as the Chinese made no move to step aside. "Kindly allow us to pass."

"Please you buy fortune wheel?" the man asked in an insolent tone. He continued to block the trail.

Sally was inclined to refuse, but thought better of it. She glanced at the man's wares which were carried in a basket strapped to his shoulders.

"What is a fortune wheel?" she questioned doubtfully.

The Chinaman displayed several curious looking metal discs which were filled with slips of paper. He demonstrated how the discs could be spun with the fingers.

"Oh, I see," Sally observed. "It's a modification of the old Chinese prayer-wheel."

"And what is a prayer-wheel?" Thelma asked in bewilderment. "I never heard of such a thing."

"Lin showed me one," Sally answered. "It was very much like this. A tiny wheel composed of metal discs which are filled with paper prayers. They are whirled mechanically by the person who wishes to acquire grace without mental effort."

"Oh, I see," Thelma replied. "These little wheels turn up a fortune instead of a prayer. I'd not mind having one as a souvenir of Moon-Gate estate."

"I'll remember the place without one," Sally said dryly.

Thelma asked the price of the fortune wheels and was discouraged to learn that they were a dollar each.

"Oh, that is entirely too much!" she protested. "They're not worth more than a quarter at most."

"This place is being run for profit, that's evident," Sally added. "I guess we'll do without a fortune wheel."

The girls started to move on but they were compelled to halt, for the Chinaman did not step aside.

"Will you kindly allow us to pass?" Sally asked sharply.

"Fortune wheel very cheap," the man replied in a low voice. "Much better you buy."

Sally and Thelma exchanged a quick glance. The threat in the Chinaman's voice was unmistakable. They glanced swiftly up and down the path. No one was close by and the only way they could bring help was by screaming. Considering their recent activities

they could not afford to cause a commotion which might lead to embarrassing inquiries.

"Oh, let's buy one of the old fortune wheels," Sally said with an attempt at carelessness.

She withdrew a dollar bill from her purse and gave it to the man. Then she started to take one of the fortune wheels from his basket, but before she could do so he thrust one of his own choosing into her hand. With a smirk and a bow he disappeared back into the trees.

"That was nothing more than banditry!" Thelma protested angrily. "Imagine paying a dollar for a fortune!"

"Probably a bad one at that," Sally answered grimly. "I noticed the man was careful to give me a particular wheel."

She glanced ruefully at the curious object in her hand, and gave the metal discs a spin. When the whirling ceased, she selected one of the papers upon which her fortune was supposed to be written.

"What does it say, Sally?"

"I can't tell. It's too dark for me to make out the words."

"I guess it doesn't matter much anyway," Thelma said indifferently. "I never did take stock in fortunes."

Sally noticed a light just ahead and the girls paused there to read the paper.

"It's a warning!" Sally exclaimed.

"A warning?" Thelma crowded close, peering over her friend's shoulder.

The "fortune" taken from the wheel read:

"Your presence at Moon-Gate estate is not desired. Leave at once and do not return if you value your lives."

"Oh, my goodness!" Thelma cried. "Does that mean us?"

"It couldn't be more pointed."

"But it was just luck that this message fell into our hands," Thelma murmured anxiously. "It couldn't have been intended especially for us!"

"I'm sure it was."

"Spin the wheel again and see what comes up," Thelma urged.

The second fortune-paper selected from the metal disc bore the identical message of the first. Sally tried a third time and once more read the warning.

"All of the papers are exactly the same," she declared. "We really had no choice at all. That Chinaman probably had been instructed to give us this particular wheel."

"He seemed to be waiting for us to appear. Sally, do you suppose we were observed leaving Mr. Wing's house?"

"I'm afraid of it. Either that or our boatman delivered Li-la's note to some other person."

"It's all so mysterious and weird," Thelma mur-

mured. "If this message came from Mr. Wing why didn't he speak to us himself instead of going to all this silly hocus-pocus?"

"It just isn't his way. A Chinaman has a quaint sense of humor, and a devious method in his approach to any subject."

"Well, we can't get out of this place too soon," Thelma said uneasily. "Mr. Wing may discover at any moment that we've taken the Buddha and when he does—"

"You're right," Sally interrupted. "Things will begin to happen then, and we'll be on the receiving end of it! I'd guess that this warning came as the result of our note to Li-la. If Mr. Wing suspected that we had been prowling inside the house, he'd have taken more drastic actions."

The girls met no one as they hastened down the winding path, but they sensed that they were being followed. Twice they stopped to glance backward as they thought they heard footsteps or the crackling of dry leaves.

"It's very likely that sneaking, dollar-snatching Chinaman," Sally whispered. "He may have been ordered to see that we obey the warning."

The girls were relieved when they reached the car. Upon this particular occasion Sally had driven her mother's coupe. She fumbled for her keys and had trouble finding them in the semi-darkness.

Somewhere on the grounds a musical clock chimed ten times.

"Ten o'clock!" Thelma exclaimed. "Where has the evening gone?"

"We must have spent longer than we thought in the chapel. I was supposed to be home by now. We'll have to make fast time on the road for I don't want to worry Mother."

Sally slid in behind the steering wheel and started the engine. The car was closely wedged between two limousines which had taken more than their allotted space. The girl was compelled to back and turn many times before she could drive out of the enclosure.

"Your fender will clear now," Thelma advised. "Full speed ahead."

She glanced quickly at Sally as the latter slowed almost to a standstill.

"Thelma, what was that queer sound?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"It seemed to come from the rear end of the car."

"Your ears must be better than mine."

"There it is again!" Sally exclaimed. "Don't you hear it?"

This time Thelma did, but she had no idea what it might be.

"I'll just take a look at the rumble," Sally said.

She applied brakes and leaped from the car. Darting around to the rear she lifted the cover of the rumble

seat. Someone crouched on the floor. At the girl's exclamation, the person slowly raised up.

"Li-la!" Sally gasped. "What are you doing here?"

Upon hearing the sound of voices, Thelma sprang out of the car and ran around to the rear. She too stared at Li-la Wing.

"Why, Li-la!" she exclaimed as the girl did not speak. "Why are you hiding in our car?"

Li-la answered with a half-sob: "I thought you would not find me until we were safely away. Please, oh, please, take me from this dreadful place."

Thelma and Sally regarded the girl with a sympathy which was tempered by caution. In view of all they had learned that night they suspected she might be acting a part.

"How did you know that Thelma and I were here?" Sally questioned.

"Your note."

"Oh! Then you did receive it."

"We thought the boatman had failed to deliver it for us," Thelma added. "Why didn't you meet us along the shore of the lake as we requested?"

"It was impossible for I was closely watched. My uncle compelled me to give up the message to him. He was very angry when he read the contents."

"So that was how he learned we were here," Sally murmured, glancing at Thelma.

"My uncle ordered Lotus to keep me under guard."

"Then how did you finally get away?" Thelma inquired.

"I pretended to go to sleep. After awhile Lotus went away for a few minutes. I slipped out of the house before anyone saw me. I knew you girls were still on the grounds, so I came here and found your car."

"Why didn't you reveal yourself at once?" Sally asked severely.

Li-la's eyes were reproachful. "As soon as my absence is discovered, a search will start. I thought you might be questioned, and it would be easier for you this way."

"What is it you wish us to do?" Sally inquired slowly.

"Oh, please take me away from here—anywhere. I can't stand it another day."

"You seemed resigned to your life when we last talked with you," Thelma said, not unkindly. "Has anything happened since then to make you alter your decision?"

"Oh, yes, many things. My uncle is so cruel. And there are other reasons," responded Li-la, her voice low and husky with despair.

"You must tell us everything if you expect aid," Sally said. "I don't mind saying that Thelma and I have observed many things which are puzzling to say the least."

"I don't wonder you are unwilling to help me.

Dreadful things go on in my uncle's house. Beyond the moon-gate door—"

"Yes?" Sally asked eagerly as Li-la hesitated.

"I thought I heard someone in the bushes," the Chinese girl said nervously.

All three listened intently for several minutes. They decided that Li-la had been mistaken.

"What goes on in the secret room?" Sally prompted.

"I have never passed through the portal."

"Yet you must have an idea of what occurs in the room beyond," Sally urged. She knew that Li-la had intended to make an important revelation but had lost her courage.

"You can't expect us to help you, Li-la, when you hide so much from us," Thelma said severely. "We feel that you owe us an explanation about the Ning-Wo emerald too."

At mention of the stolen gem, a look of fear came over Li-la's face. After a brief struggle with herself she said tensely:

"I will explain everything, but there is no time now. If my uncle finds me here my one chance of escape is lost."

Sally realized full well that it was a serious matter to help Li-la escape from Moon-Gate, but she had been impressed by the girl's story. She believed that Li-la might be able to shed light upon the many mysterious happenings which centered about the emerald.

"I'll take you away, Li-la," she promised after a moment's reflection, "but you must play fair with us. We'll expect you to keep your promise."

"I shall," Li-la replied. "Only please—hurry—or it will be too late."

Sally and Thelma helped her from the rumble and she squeezed between them in the front seat.

"I've had such an unhappy time since last I saw you," Li-la revealed as the car rolled down the gravel road leading to the main gate. "That night after we attended the Lantern Festival my uncle caught me trying to reenter the house. I was severely punished."

She extended a wrist which was bruised and swollen.

"He did that to you?" Thelma gasped.

The car was drawing near the gate where a Chinaman stood guard.

"Crouch down below the instrumentboard so you'll not be recognized," Sally ordered Li-la.

The girl quickly obeyed. As the car came closer to the exit Sally and Thelma were disturbed to observe that the gate was closed. The servant made no move to open it for them even when the automobile came to a standstill.

"Now what?" Sally muttered under her breath. "It looks as if something is wrong."

From the shadows came another figure which the girls had failed to observe. The man walked to the car

and flung open the door. It was Li-la's uncle, Mr. Wing.

Without a word to Sally or Thelma he reached in and dragged the trembling Li-la from the car.

Too late the girls realized the significance of the slight noise which had been heard in the bushes. Undoubtedly the stern owner of Moon-Gate estate had followed Sally and Thelma to their car and had overheard Li-la's plea for aid and her promise to tell everything regarding Mr. Chan's emerald. Instead of accosting the girls there it had pleased Mr. Wing to await them at the gate.

In the darkness Thelma's hand closed nervously over the Buddha. If Mr. Wing knew that it was missing from the chapel, then indeed their situation was a serious one.

For the moment the Chinaman's attention was centered upon his unfortunate niece. He did not release her wrist from his iron grip but persisted in short, sharp, cruel twists which made the girl wince from pain. Precarious as was their own situation, Thelma and Sally could not help being more concerned with Li-la's plight.

"I do not like traitors," Mr. Wing said with a bitter inflection, "even when they are of my own flesh and blood. You shall pay dearly for this, unrighteous daughter of evil."

He punctuated his words with another vicious twist at the girl's imprisoned wrist.

"Oh, don't!" she screamed in anguish.

Sally no longer could remain silent.

"Let go of her!" she cried angrily. "Have at least a little decency about you! The girl has done nothing criminal. She was only trying to escape from a man unfit to be her guardian!"

Sally's fury cooled somewhat before the words scarcely were spoken and she regretted addressing him so harshly.

"So you dare to intrude," Mr. Wing said insolently. His tone carried a distinct threat. "You do not have any legitimate affairs of your own, so you must interfere in matters which do not concern you."

"I am at least human," Sally retorted, her anger returning. "That gives me a right to protest your treatment of Li-la."

Mr. Wing fixed the two girls with a cold gaze which chilled and frightened them.

"You have received one warning, and now I shall give you another," he said. "Leave my premises at once. And remember this—the hand which strikes in the dark will not be patient forever."

CHAPTER XV

AID FOR LI-LA

MR. WING raised his arm in signal and a Chinaman swung open the heavy iron gate.

"Go," Li-la urged as Sally hesitated. "You can do nothing for me now."

The girls did not wish to desert Li-la, yet if they defied Mr. Wing, the man undoubtedly would have them ejected forcibly from the grounds. Reluctantly, they obeyed his command.

"Such a cruel man!" Thelma exclaimed as they drove through the gate. "No wonder Li-la hates him."

"He'll treat her worse than ever now. No matter what Li-la may have done, she shouldn't be under the control of a man like Mr. Wing. Someone ought to do something about it."

"We've interfered entirely too much now if you ask me, Sally. I didn't like Mr. Wing's threat about the hand in the dark!"

"Oh, he'll be afraid to try any tricks with us for fear of tangling with the law. It's Li-la who is in danger."

"In danger?"

Sally nodded soberly, her eyes on the ribbon of pavement.

"Yes, she promised to tell us about the emerald, and Mr. Wing probably heard, for he called her a traitor. Li-la knows entirely too much for her own safety. Her uncle is determined that she shall never reveal what goes on at Moon-Gate estate."

"I wish we could help Li-la, but there's nothing we can do."

"I disagree with you there."

"You mean we ought to go to the police?"

"Perhaps, but that's not what I have in my mind. I intend to talk with my parents, and I believe they'll try to help."

When Sally reached home after dropping Thelma off at the French home, the guests had departed. Mr. and Mrs. Brandon, worried over their daughter's lengthy absence were thinking of starting toward Moon-Gate estate, when the car swung into the driveway.

In astonishment they listened to Sally's strange tale, blaming themselves because they had allowed the two girls to venture alone to such a place. Both Mr. and Mrs. Brandon were moved by the report of Li-la's unfortunate plight.

"Father, do you suppose the police could compel Mr. Wing to turn Li-la over to them?"

"Not without certain definite evidence, and from

what you tell me, Li-la herself may be mixed up in the theft of the emerald."

"Thelma and I are afraid of it."

"From various sources I have learned that Moon-Gate estate has been raided in months past," Mr. Brandon continued. "Mr. Wing always has been well prepared for the officers. Forewarned, he treats them courteously and they find no evidence of any kind."

"You believe that if the police went to the estate to question Li-la she would have vanished?"

"That would be my guess, Sally."

"I figured it out more or less the same way. For that reason, I wonder if it might not be possible to aid Li-la through one of the Chinese missions. I've heard they do marvelous work."

"Oh, they have helped any number of Chinese girls," Mrs. Brandon declared enthusiastically. "In fact, the police often consult the mission officials when they have a difficult case."

After a discussion which lasted until long after midnight, Sally went off to bed, warmed by her mother's promise that the following day they would visit one of the missions together.

Shortly after breakfast the next morning Mrs. Brandon and her daughter presented themselves at a well-known building in Chinatown, a house which had sheltered many a Chinese girl who had fled from a cruel master.

Mrs. Kellog who headed the mission, received Sally and her mother with courtesy. She was a soft-spoken, white-haired lady, and to gaze at her it was not easy to believe that in her younger days she had led many a raid upon Chinese dens. Even now in Chinatown's comparative quiet, she was regarded as an aggressive figure, a fearless woman who acknowledged no obstacle in her work of aiding unfortunate Chinese girls.

Mrs. Kellog's alert, blue eyes burned with an inner fire as she listened to Sally's report of Li-la's unhappy life at Moon-Gate estate.

"I know the place all too well," she nodded, "and for months I have been after the police to make a thorough investigation. I was not aware that Mr. Wing kept a niece there."

"Will it be possible to help the girl?" Mrs. Brandon inquired.

"The Mission will gladly take her in," Mrs. Kellog replied instantly. "How to wrest her from Mr. Wing will be the problem."

"He'll never give her up willingly," Sally said.

"They never do, my dear. But the Mission has ways of compelling a Chinaman to listen to reason. This case will be a comparatively simple one I think. But before we go ahead I must be certain that your facts are correct."

"I have told you everything," Sally answered.

"Yes, my dear, I understand. But thirty years of

service in the Mission has taught me that in dealing with the Chinese, appearances are not always as they seem. Another thing—are you certain the girl wishes to leave her uncle?”

“Oh, yes!”

“I’ve seen plenty of them change their minds,” Mrs. Kellog said grimly. “When they are offered new silk dresses, ornaments for their hair and rings of jade, they sometimes decide that a life at the Mission would be too hard.”

“Li-la is not like that I am sure,” Sally said.

“I must talk with her myself. She is at Moon-Gate you say.”

“We left her there last night.”

“Then suppose we go to the estate tomorrow evening,” Mrs. Kellog said briskly. “I’ll need you, Miss Brandon to identify the girl.”

“Mr. Wing will never let me inside the gate again. If he suspects why you are there, I’m afraid you’ll have trouble too, Mrs. Kellog.”

“I have met Mr. Wing’s kind before,” Mrs. Kellog replied confidently. “I shall look for you tomorrow night at eight o’clock. You’ll find me waiting in my car not far from the main gate.”

Mrs. Brandon and Sally thanked the missionary for her assistance and left the building. They were a trifle bewildered with the speed at which everything had been decided.

"Mrs. Kellog seems to know exactly what she means to do," Sally's mother observed thoughtfully as they drove toward home. "I have a great deal of confidence in her. Otherwise, I'd not allow you to return again to Moon-Gate estate."

"I'm not so eager to go there myself," Sally admitted truthfully. "Mr. Wing may not be as easy to handle as she believes."

Arriving home, Mrs. Brandon and Sally were met at the door by Lin.

"Telegram-message come," he reported, offering a sealed yellow envelope to Sally's mother.

"Oh, it's sure to be bad news," Mrs. Brandon murmured anxiously. "You open it, Sally."

The girl quickly scanned the brief message.

"Aunt Jessie is seriously ill at a hospital in Los Angeles. They want you and Father to come immediately."

Mrs. Brandon snatched the paper from her daughter's hand, reading it for herself.

"It doesn't say what is wrong," she said. "A month ago when I saw Jessie she was well and strong. I'll go at once."

"Shall I call Father at his office?"

"Yes, Sally, and then I wish you'd help pack our bags. Telephone the railroad station too if you will, please."

Within a few minutes Mr. Brandon reached the

house and after a consultation decided that he would accompany his wife to Los Angeles.

"It will be better for you to remain here, Sally," Mrs. Brandon told her daughter. "In the light of recent happenings, Lin isn't to be trusted with the household. Invite Thelma to spend the nights with you."

"She'll be glad to do it, Mother. Don't you worry, we'll get along fine."

"We'll send you a wire as soon as possible," Mrs. Brandon promised. "We'll try not to be gone longer than two or three days."

Sally accompanied her parents to the railroad station. As the train was coming in, Mr. Brandon took a small packet from his pocket and handed it to his daughter.

"These are important papers which I forgot to turn over to my secretary, Miss Hanson," he explained. "She'll need them during my absence."

"You want me to take them to the office right away?"

"Yes, please, Sally. Miss Hanson understands all about them. Just give her the packet."

The train was in the station. Sally watched her parents climb aboard, waved to them after they had found their seats, and then walked slowly back to the parking lot.

A ten minutes drive brought her to her father's office. Sally knew Miss Hanson very well, and after she had delivered the papers, she remained to chat for a little while.

"A report just came in which I think your father might have wished to see before he left," Miss Hanson remarked regretfully. She indicated a typewritten paper on her desk. "He requested me to learn everything I could about a sea captain named Hammil."

"Oh, I know about that matter," Sally said quickly. "May I see the report?"

Miss Hanson offered it for her inspection. Jake Hammil's difficulties with the law occupied a quarter of the page but he had never been convicted of any crime. At the bottom of the report, a notation had been made of Mr. Hammil's address, and likewise the name of a tavern which he frequented.

"The Red Lion," Sally read aloud. "Do you know where that is, Miss Hanson?"

"I have heard of the place. It is close to the other address."

Sally chatted with the secretary for awhile and then left the office. Because time was heavy upon her, she decided that it would be interesting to trace down Mr. Hammil's rooming house. The information might prove valuable later on if she should make up her mind to report everything to the police.

"I wish Mother and Dad hadn't been called away just at this time," she thought. "After Mrs. Kellog starts her investigation, I have a feeling that matters may come to a head at Moon-Gate."

Sally turned down a narrow street which led to the

water front. Wharves were piled high with merchandise and gigantic swinging yardarms hoisted boxes and barrels from the holds of ocean-going vessels. Heavy trucks thundered by, crowding Sally out of her half of the thoroughfare. It was a noisy scene, but one which the girl loved.

She drove on until she came presently to a dingy street frequented by foreigners and seamen. Sally had very little trouble in locating the address given her by Miss Hanson. The house was painted better than its neighbors but otherwise there was nothing to distinguish it.

Sally sat staring at the place for a time. At first she thought she would not go in, but unless she did make inquiries for Hammil she could not be certain that he still lived there.

After considering, she parked the car and walked up to the door. Boldly she rang the bell. If by chance Jake Hammil himself should answer, she would merely pretend that she was inquiring for some other person.

A squat, fat woman in a wrinkled gingham dress appeared in the doorway.

"What do you want?" she asked, regarding Sally suspiciously. The woman's searching gaze made the girl conscious that she was dressed far too well for a call in such a poverty stricken district.

"Does a man by the name of Jake Hammil live at this house?" Sally inquired politely.

"Yes, but he ain't here now," the woman answered curtly. "He's probably down at the Red Lion. He takes his meals there."

"Thank you, I'll try that place," Sally said, turning away.

"I'm pretty sure you'll catch him there, because he said he had to meet someone," the woman contributed, becoming more friendly. "If you don't find him maybe you'd better come back here and wait. Jake is pullin' out sometime tomorrow and you might miss him."

"Mr. Hammil is leaving?" Sally inquired alertly.

"Sure, he goes and comes according to when his ship's in port."

"For what place is he bound this time?" Sally asked. Her attempt to speak in a casual tone was not entirely successful.

"Say, it seems to me you're pretty interested in Jake's affairs," the woman answered suspiciously. "Why don't you ask him?"

"Thanks, that's what I'll do," Sally answered good-naturedly as she took herself away.

The Red Lion was located in the same block. Sally walked past it twice before she made up her mind to enter. The tavern was a dirty, smoke-scented room crowded with tables, unoccupied save for three men and a woman.

At first Sally did not think that Jake Hammil was

in the restaurant, and then she saw him at one of the tables toward the rear of the room. He was eating his lunch in company with a sailor.

Sally seated herself nearby. Hammil glanced curiously toward her and then took no further notice.

"What'll you have?" asked a voice at Sally's elbow. A waiter in a greasy kitchen apron had come to take her order.

"Bring me a fried ham sandwich," Sally requested nervously.

While waiting for the order to be filled, she watched Hammil without appearing to do so. What she had expected to learn, Sally did not know. Her curiosity had been aroused by the landlady's remark that Hammil intended to meet a man at the Red Lion—a certain intuition had made her think that the interview might be a significant one.

Seeing the pair together, Sally became convinced that she was only wasting time. Hammil merely was lunching with a seafaring crony. They both devoted themselves to their food, scarcely speaking a word.

The waiter brought Sally's sandwich. She ate it as fast as she could, determined to get away from the place. Just as she was ready to leave, Hammil pushed aside his plate and said to his companion in a voice loud enough for the girl to hear:

"Well, what do you say, Barker? I'm offering you good pay and good food if you sign with me."

"I'm not a kickin' on the pay," the sailor muttered. "But I want to know what cargo you're carryin' on the *White Lady*."

"That's my business," Hammil answered harshly. "You've been down on your luck now for six months and you can't afford to be too particular. Either you sign or you don't. I've got to have my answer now."

The other man toyed with his knife, his eyes on the tablecloth.

"Well?" Hammil demanded impatiently.

"Sure, I might as well," the other said at last. "What have I got to lose?"

"Now you're talking sense," Hammil exclaimed approvingly. "Get your duds together and don't explain where you're going. We sail at midnight tonight."

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE RED LION

HAMMIL's voice dropped to an indistinct murmur, but Sally had heard enough to feel certain that the tramp freighter, the *White Lady* would sail from Moon-Gate point that very evening at midnight.

"Hammil's landlady said he was leaving tomorrow," the girl reflected alertly. "Probably he told her that for the deliberate purpose of covering his movements."

Paying her bill at the cashier's desk, Sally left the Red Lion. In an instant a need had arisen to alter all of the plans which she had made previously. When she had talked with Mrs. Kellog they both assumed they would have plenty of time to act. Now matters were almost certain to come to a head that night.

"Mr. Wing might take it into his head to send Li-la off on the boat just to get her out of the way," Sally thought. "At any rate, by tomorrow it will be impossible to secure any evidence at Moon-Gate."

Her first act was to telephone Mrs. Kellog from a convenient drugstore. She was connected with the Mission only to be informed that the head woman was not there. No, Mrs. Kellog had not said when

she would return. She might come in by late afternoon.

Sally gave the Mission her name and telephone number, requesting that Mrs. Kellog call her.

"Something should be done immediately or it will be too late to gain evidence against anyone," the girl reflected. "Perhaps Mr. Chan would know what to do."

Sally decided to return home for the Buddha taken from Mr. Wing's home, and then call at the shop of the Chinese merchant.

As the car turned in at the Brandon driveway, Thelma, an old sweater thrown over her shoulders, came running out to meet her friend.

"Something odd happened while you were away, Sally," she reported excitedly.

"Nothing serious I hope."

"Two Chinamen came to see Lin."

"Perhaps they were friends of his or those cousins he's always talking about."

"I don't think so," Thelma said, "for he seemed afraid of them. He tried to make them go away and when they wouldn't he gave them money. I was watching it all from our porch."

"The men finally went away?"

"Yes, but they took Lin with them."

"You mean he's not here now?" Sally asked.

"No, he only left about ten minutes ago."

"Well, that's absolutely the last straw!" Sally exclaimed indignantly. "Mother made Lin promise faithfully that he'd attend to his duties while she was gone. Then he goes away almost before she is out of sight!"

"I don't believe Lin wanted to go."

"Did he take his luggage?"

"Not that I observed."

"I'll run up to his room just to make sure," Sally said, opening the side door which Lin had failed to lock. "Come on in, Thelma."

The girls found the house carefully cleaned and dusted. Thelma sat down to wait while her friend darted up to the attic room. Sally was gone nearly ten minutes.

"Lin's luggage is still upstairs so I guess he intends to return sometime," she reported. "Here is something interesting which I found."

Sally held up a slip of yellow rice paper.

"It's the same as Mr. Chan picked up in your library!" Thelma exclaimed.

"And a passport through the mysterious moon-gate door," Sally added.

"Where did you find it?"

"On the floor of Lin's clothes closet. Evidently it had dropped from his pocket. I caught Lin with one of these yellow papers a few days ago and he tried to pretend it had no significance. I know better now."

"Yes, we saw enough at Mr. Wing's house to be sure the slips serve as a means of identification at the moon-gate door."

"I'll keep this," Sally declared, placing the paper carefully in her purse. "I may need it tonight."

"What is going to happen tonight?" Thelma asked in surprise.

"I only wish I knew. The *White Lady* sails at midnight, and I believe she will carry some sort of contraband cargo."

"Where did you learn all that?"

Sally related in detail the conversation overheard at the Red Lion tavern. She ended by saying that she planned to consult Mr. Chan at once.

"Don't you want to come with me, Thelma?"

"Yes, I'll telephone Mother and it will save me running back home."

Thelma made the call while Sally wrapped up the golden Buddha. Since bringing it home from Moon-Gate estate she had kept it locked in her father's desk drawer, safely away from Lin's prying eyes.

"Lend me a hat, will you, Sally?" Thelma requested as the girls started to leave the house with their treasure. "I look like an Indian with my hair flying around."

"I'll let you have my new blue one," Sally offered generously, getting it from the closet shelf. "I've only worn it twice."

At last the girls were ready, after Thelma had admired her reflection in two different mirrors. The hat was a perfect fit and very becoming.

"I should have telephoned Mr. Chan before we started," Sally remarked anxiously, parking the automobile not far from the merchant's shop. "We may not find him in."

A Chinese clerk approached the girls courteously as they entered the store.

"We should like to see Mr. Chan," Sally requested. "Please tell him that it is very important."

The clerk disappeared. In a few minutes he came back to say that Mr. Chan would be highly honored to see the young ladies. They were escorted to the office room at the back of the building.

Mr. Chan arose from his desk as the girls entered. He was thinner than when they last had seen him and he looked wrinkled and old.

"To see you again brings me great pleasure," he greeted them.

Although Mr. Chan must have known that the girls came to impart information, he disclosed not the slightest eagerness to hear what they might have to say. He carefully inquired about their health and the health of Sally's parents. Not until these preliminaries were out of the way did he evidence any interest in the package which the girls had placed on his desk.

"We have brought back your Buddha," Sally told him at the first opportunity. "At least we think it is yours. Will you please examine the figure and see if you can identify it."

With no display of haste, Mr. Chan opened the parcel. But his eyes burned with a deep intensity as he gazed upon the golden Buddha.

"Yes, it is the same," he said. "The emerald—"

"It is gone," Sally revealed. "The Buddha was empty when we found it at Moon-Gate estate."

"Moon-Gate," Mr. Chan repeated softly. "Ah, yes, I have suspected my enemy, but until now I had no proof."

He questioned the girls regarding how the figure had fallen into their hands. They gave him a complete account of their adventure, save that they were careful to make no mention of the moon-gate door.

"We were unable to learn how the Buddha chanced to be in Mr. Wing's house," Sally declared. "For that matter, Thelma and I are still mystified because the emerald was originally discovered in the box which we purchased from you."

"Do not allow that fact to distress you," Mr. Chan rejoined. "Li-la Wing came to my shop for the purpose of stealing the Ning-Wo emerald. My clerks did not watch her closely enough and I too was careless. She obtained the gem, and then fearing she would be

searched, placed it in a box of worthless articles, later sold to you, Miss Brandon."

"How can you be sure it was Li-la who took the emerald?" Sally questioned.

"Her own actions betrayed her. I have known from the day I questioned her at the auction that the theft of the gem was the work of my enemy, Wing. Until now I had no proof."

"Everything is so hopelessly mixed up," Sally protested. "Even though we did find the Buddha at the Wing house that doesn't absolutely prove Li-la's guilt. Someone else might have brought the figure there."

Mr. Chan smiled wisely.

"It is quite possible. The girl is merely the pawn of her uncle, one of many who serve him. But it is through her that I shall strike!"

Thelma and Sally regarded each other uneasily. In making their plans to bring the Buddha to Mr. Chan they had not thought how deeply such action would involve Li-la.

"Might we ask what you intend to do, Mr. Chan?" Sally inquired timidly. "That is—about Li-la."

"I feel a deep reluctance to air my difficulties in your most efficient courts," Mr. Chan replied gravely, "but in this case I know of no better way to bring humiliation upon Wing. I shall have his niece arrested."

"Oh!" Thelma murmured.

"You seem distressed by my decision."

"Well, you see, we went to school with Li-la," Sally explained. "If the emerald should be returned to you, Mr. Chan, would you consider being lenient toward her?"

"She is so very young," Thelma added quickly, "and as you say, the pawn of her uncle."

"The emerald will never be returned," the merchant replied sadly. "My fate was sealed on the day it was stolen from me."

"If you feel certain Mr. Wing has the gem, I should think you might force him to give it up," Thelma said in surprise. "Is there no hope of doing so?"

"None."

"Couldn't Moon-Gate be searched by the police?" Thelma persisted.

"Ah, yes, but the emerald would not be found. Mr. Wing is a clever man who plotted my ruin most cunningly. Through his niece I shall even the score, yet myself I cannot save."

"Surely it wasn't your fault that the emerald was stolen," Thelma murmured. "You shouldn't be expected to repay the sum."

"The question is not entirely one of money," Mr. Chan explained. "I have lost the respect of my friends and associates in business. I shall liquidate all

assets to repay my tong, but even so the debt will never be settled in full."

"Somehow the emerald may be recovered," Sally said hopefully.

Mr. Chan shook his head. "Please do not trouble yourselves over my slight difficulties," he said. "There is nothing anyone can do. When the horse is on the brink of the precipice it is too late to pull the reins."

Sally and Thelma could not understand the merchant's fatalistic attitude. In their opinion a great deal might be done to recover the emerald. They pressed the matter no further, feeling that they had said all they dared.

As they presently arose to depart, Sally remembered that she had failed to provide Mr. Chan with an important item of information. She told him everything she had learned about Jake Hammil and his freighter of ill repute, the *White Lady*. Strangely, Mr. Chan seemed more moved than at any time during the interview.

"The vessel is scheduled to sail at midnight?" he asked softly.

"Yes," Sally answered, "I understood it that way."

"In coming to me you acted wisely," Mr. Chan thanked the girls. "Your information will be of the greatest assistance."

"Then as a special favor in return for our help I

hope you'll be generous in dealing with Li-la Wing," Sally said quickly. "It is difficult for me to believe that she was the one who took the emerald."

Mr. Chan smiled tolerantly.

"It is never easy to acknowledge treachery in one's friends. I deeply regret I can make you no promise."

Mr. Chan walked with the girls to the entrance of the shop. He apologized for not inviting them to call again, saying that the establishment was to be sold at auction the following week.

"If Mr. Chan is selling everything then it must be true that he's ruined financially," Thelma commented as the girls walked to their car. "If he's legally responsible for the loss of the emerald he ought to take the bankruptcy law."

"You might suggest it to him," Sally responded with a rueful laugh. "In Chinese society there is no such thing as bankruptcy. At New Year's all debts are settled, and a man who fails to meet his obligations is disgraced."

"I can't understand why Mr. Chan is so positive that his emerald will never be recovered."

"He probably believes that Mr. Wing has disposed of the gem long ago."

"He didn't get rid of the Buddha."

"No, but that was different," Sally answered. "I'm worried about Li-la. I wanted to help her and as

matters have turned out I'm sending her straight to jail."

"I feel dreadfully about it too, but we couldn't protect a thief."

"Despite what Mr. Chan said, Thelma, the evidence isn't conclusive that Li-la is guilty. I can't help believing that her own story might throw a different light on the matter."

"She'll be privileged to tell it to the police."

"Li-la will never talk when she is taken to court. The Chinese seldom do. Besides, if Mr. Chan seeks help from the police, you may be sure he'll make a tight case against Li-la. Whether she is guilty or innocent he'll try to strike at his enemy, Wing, through her."

"Yes, that is the unfortunate part of it. But what can we do?"

"It seems to me that Mrs. Kellog is our real hope. She has genuine sympathy for Li-la, and understands her problem."

"Then let's go to Mrs. Kellog."

"I tried to telephone her earlier today, but she couldn't be reached at the Mission. I'll try again now."

The girls stopped at the nearest corner drugstore. Upon contacting the Mission by telephone, Sally again was informed that Mrs. Kellog had not re-

turned. Anxiously the girl glanced at her wrist watch. Already it was after four o'clock.

"When do you expect her in?" she inquired.

"We thought she would be here before this. We expect her at any moment."

"It may be impossible for her to reach me at my home," Sally said after a brief hesitation. "I wish you would give her this message. Tell Mrs. Kellog that an important matter has arisen which makes it imperative for us to act at once. I will meet her at eight o'clock tonight at Moon-Gate estate instead of tomorrow evening as we agreed. Do you have that?"

The party at the other end of the wire repeated the message exactly as she had given it.

"Yes, that is correct," Sally said. "Don't fail to tell Mrs. Kellog that it is very important for her to meet me."

"She will keep the appointment I feel sure."

Sally hung up the receiver, turning to face Thelma who looked decidedly worried.

"Surely you're not intending to venture out to Moon-Gate estate tonight, Sally?"

"Yes, I must."

"You're likely to run into serious trouble. Have you forgotten Mr. Wing's threat?"

"I've forgotten nothing," Sally answered gravely. "I understand perfectly the risk involved, but Mrs. Kellog and I must act tonight or never."

CHAPTER XVII

AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT

LIN had not returned to the Brandon home by the time the girls arrived after their interview with Mr. Chan. Sally was both worried and provoked over his long absence, for she could not imagine why the servant should remain away unless he intended to give up his position.

"He may be detained forcibly by those two Chinamen who took him away," Thelma ventured. "I didn't like their looks at all."

"Lin has mixed himself up in some dishonorable affair, I'm sure of that," Sally admitted. "He was such a good servant. I don't see why he had to turn out like this."

After awhile the girls went over to the French home next door to ask if Thelma might spend the night with her friend. Mrs. French readily consented, cordially inviting Sally to take dinner with the family.

"I am expecting an important telephone call," Sally explained regretfully. "For that reason I'd like to remain at home. Thelma and I will have fun getting our own dinner."

During the afternoon the two girls stayed close by the telephone, waiting for a call which never came. They prepared themselves an early dinner and washed up the dishes. Sally had not eaten very much. She kept watching the clock and grew more uneasy as the minutes ticked away.

"Do you suppose Mrs. Kellog might have telephoned while we were at your house, Thelma?"

"It's possible. Why don't you call her again?"

The Mission reported that the head woman had not been located.

"We can't understand what is detaining her," Sally was told. "Yes, we have every reason to believe she will return here for her dinner. You may be sure we'll give her your message the moment we reach her."

Sally hung up the receiver and sank down on the davenport again, the picture of dejection.

"Maybe you ought to telephone the police," Thelma suggested doubtfully.

"I don't know what I'd tell them."

"Why, everything that has happened. Especially the part about the *White Lady*."

"It all sounds so fantastic I doubt if they'll believe me. They may think it's some school girl joke."

"It's the business of the police to investigate."

After pacing the floor for a few minutes, Sally abruptly picked up the telephone and gave the number of the central police station. She was switched from

one person to another until finally she found a man who listened attentively to what she had to report. His terse questions warned her that while he did not doubt her sincerity, he had no confidence that her facts were accurate.

"We'll look into the case," he promised. "An officer will come out to talk with you."

Sally waited a half hour, but no one arrived from the police station and Mrs. Kellog did not telephone. It was now seven o'clock.

"I'm not going to waste any more time," Sally said decisively. She went to the closet for her wraps.

"What are you thinking of doing?" Thelma asked apprehensively.

"I'll drive out to Moon-Gate estate. There's a chance Mrs. Kellog may meet me there."

"And if she fails?"

"I haven't thought that far ahead."

"I don't believe she'll get your message in time, Sally. It's a foolhardy thing to do."

"The police may get there eventually, so I should have some sort of protection. I'm not going to sit quietly by and allow Mr. Wing to ship Li-la off on that boat if I can help it."

"Perhaps he has no intention of doing that, Sally."

"It would be a smart trick, for then she could never expose him. Mr. Wing is afraid of Li-la's knowledge. No, I'm going, Thelma!"

"Then so am I!"

"There's no need for both of us to venture into trouble."

"If you go I shall go too," Thelma announced determinedly. "You'll need a conservative person along to keep you out of mischief."

Sally offered no further protest and the two girls left the house together. During the last hour a fog had arisen, and the air was heavy and cold.

"One can't see a yard ahead," Sally complained, switching on the bright headlights of the car.

Along the bay road automobiles moved at a snail's pace. The girls watched closely, fearing that they would drive past the turn-off road which led to Moon-Gate estate.

"The place won't have many visitors on a night such as this," Thelma predicted.

"The night is ideal for our purposes, except that it will be difficult to distinguish Mrs. Kellog's car."

"She'll not be here anyway," Thelma declared.

Sally shared her chum's opinion, yet she had made up her mind to maintain a vigil close to the gate until after the appointed hour of eight o'clock. There was an outside chance that Mrs. Kellog might have returned to the Mission after the girls had started for the estate.

Sally drew up a short distance from the main gate, taking care to park far enough from the highway so

that her car would not be struck by another vehicle. She then switched off her lights.

Minutes passed. Finally the girls observed an automobile approaching. They grew hopeful as they watched the brilliant headbeams cut through the blanket of fog, but the car crept past and turned in at the estate.

"That couldn't have been Mrs. Kellog," Sally commented in disappointment. "She wouldn't have turned in."

"It must be eight o'clock now," Thelma said.

Sally switched on the interior car light long enough to glance at her watch.

"It's ten after."

"Then there's no use waiting any longer."

"She might come late, Thelma. It's a long drive out here from the Mission."

They waited twenty minutes longer.

"I guess she isn't coming," Sally acknowledged reluctantly. "If anything is done to help Li-la we must do it ourselves."

Thelma glanced apprehensively at her friend, for she knew from Sally's tone that she had some plan in mind.

"You wait here, Thelma. If I'm not back in an hour drive to town for the police."

"What are you going to do?"

"I intend to see Li-la if it is possible."

"I'll answer that question for you—it won't be.

You'll never get inside the gate, and if you should, Mr. Wing will bounce you out on your ear!"

"I don't aim to use the gate. I'll get in the same way Li-la did. Over the fence."

"It's dangerous."

"I know that," Sally admitted grimly, "but something has to be done. If the police ever do come they're apt to bungle things."

The girls argued the matter for several minutes. When Thelma saw that Sally could not be persuaded to give up her daring plan, she insisted upon accompanying her. They ran the car a short distance down the road, parking it close against the iron fence. By stepping on the running board and then on the fender, it was easy to mount the barrier.

"It's so foggy I doubt that anyone will notice the car," Sally whispered after the girls had leaped down inside the grounds.

Taking no risk of losing their way, they moved stealthily along the fence toward the main gate. When they were close enough to make out a shadowy figure standing on guard, they cut across the grounds in the direction of the parking lot.

The enclosure had not been illuminated and in the darkness they missed it, coming presently to the edge of a high cliff.

"We might have walked right off into space!" Thelma gasped.

Far below, they could hear waves splashing against the rocks. The powerful beam from a lighthouse close by made little impression upon the dense mist which shrouded the shore; at regular intervals a deep-throated fog horn called its warning to vessels at sea.

"Look out there!" Sally directed her companion, pointing below them. "Isn't that a light from a boat?"

"Yes, it must be. Do you suppose the *White Lady* is anchored just off the shore?"

"That's what I would guess."

The girls wandered about until they found a path which led toward the Wing house. Lights glowed in the restaurant and a few diners sat grouped about the tables, but otherwise there was very little activity.

"What do you expect to do now that we're here?" Thelma whispered as they huddled among the trees.

"We'll have to get into the house if we expect to talk with Li-la."

For a long while the girls stood in the darkness watching the side door of the Wing house. Occasionally, a Chinaman entered and did not return.

"We managed it all right the last time," Sally said at length. "Let's try to get into the chapel again."

After looking about in all directions, the girls stole to the side door. It had not been locked. They stepped into the corridor and moved swiftly toward the chapel. Suddenly a door opened behind them.

Sally and Thelma whirled about, expecting to find

themselves face to face either with Mr. Wing or one of his servants. Instead they saw Li-la who was even more startled than they.

"Oh, you shouldn't have come here!" the Chinese girl exclaimed fearfully.

She opened the door of her own apartment, and pushed Sally and Thelma inside.

"Lotus will be back in a few minutes," she warned. "It will not be safe for you to remain. You must leave the estate and never return."

"We came to help you, Li-la," Sally said.

"There is nothing you can do to aid me," the girl answered. "I am satisfied to stay here with my uncle."

"You are satisfied—" Sally echoed in confusion.

She felt that in coming to Moon-Gate estate she truly had blundered. Too late she recalled Mrs. Kellog's remark that Li-la might not really wish to leave her uncle. Perhaps he had offered her special concessions and in a twinkling she had changed her entire view point. The girls had risked a great deal to assist Li-la and now she calmly told them that she did not require their aid.

Sally had imagined that the Chinese girl was virtually the prisoner of Mr. Wing. Instead, they found her unguarded and free to roam the house as she chose.

"I guess we have made a mistake all right," Sally admitted ruefully. "We will go, Li-la."

The Chinese girl opened the door and peered down

the corridor. She closed it softly as footsteps were heard.

"Now!" Li-la commanded after the sound had died away.

Still the girls hesitated. Despite Li-la's words they felt that she needed their help. They could not fail to notice that her eyes were inflamed from recent tears.

"Li-la," Sally said impulsively, "we can't go without giving you a warning. You are suspected of stealing Mr. Chan's emerald. The police may come here to arrest you at any moment."

"My uncle will protect me—if I do not offend him."

The remark revealed a great deal to Sally. She believed now that Mr. Wing had bargained with his niece, threatening her with exposure to the law unless she did exactly as he bade. Li-la had entered no denial against the charge that she had stolen Mr. Chan's gem. One could only assume that she were guilty.

"Li-la, a great wrong has been done Mr. Chan," Sally said earnestly. "You have the power to save him from ruin. Tell us everything you know about the emerald."

"I cannot." Fear lurked in Li-la's eyes.

"When we tried to help you escape from these grounds you promised that you would reveal everything."

"I spoke rashly. There is nothing I can tell you now."

"Your uncle has threatened you?"

Li-la did not answer. Tears came into her eyes and she turned her head.

"After all, you really feel a deep affection for your uncle?" Sally inquired gently.

"No, I detest him!" Li-la cried in a blaze of anger. "He is cruel and wicked!"

"Then come with us," Thelma pleaded. "We'll take you away from here."

"Where could I go?"

"The Mission will take you in," Sally said eagerly. "You will be safe from your uncle there."

The hope in Li-la's eyes gradually faded away. She shook her head.

"I might be free of my uncle, but never could I escape your Law."

"If you have done no wrong you need not be afraid," Sally told her. "You could not be blamed for your uncle's deeds."

"Oh, you do not understand."

"I think I do," Sally answered quietly. "You really did steal Mr. Chan's emerald?"

"Yes."

For a moment the girls stared at one another. Sally and Thelma could find nothing to say.

"You see, I am not deserving of help," Li-la murmured at last. "I am deeply grateful for your kindness

to me but we can never be friends. You must not involve yourselves in my hopeless affairs."

"You must have had some reason—" Sally began, but Li-la cut her short.

"Lotus will return at any moment, and your escape will then be impossible. Go now before it is too late."

She again opened the door, and the girls glided noiselessly out into the vacant corridor.

"You need not come with us, Li-la," Sally whispered as she saw that the girl meant to escort them to the door. "We will reach the exit in safety."

Li-la nodded and retreated into her apartment, closing the door softly.

Sally grasped Thelma's hand, but instead of moving toward the side door, she drew her companion toward the chapel.

"We're not leaving just yet," she said significantly.

"Sally!" Thelma remonstrated. "We must leave at once!"

"Not until I've learned a few more things," Sally replied determinedly. "Tonight we must find out what goes on behind the moon-gate door!"

CHAPTER XVIII

WAYS THAT ARE DARK

DESPITE Thelma's protests, Sally pulled her along the corridor until they reached the fan-shaped portal of the chapel. There they secreted themselves behind the altar which had served them so well upon their previous visit.

"I don't see what more we can learn," Thelma complained. "Anyway, I'm tired of trying to interfere in other folks affairs. See how matters turned out with Li-la."

"We may be able to help her yet."

"How can we when she openly admitted that she took Mr. Chan's emerald? I'll not protect a thief, Sally."

"I'd not want to do it either. But I can't help thinking Li-la wasn't really to blame for what she did."

The girls fell silent as they heard footsteps in the corridor. Several Chinamen entered the chapel, seating themselves on the low prayer benches. In a few minutes others came until the room was fairly crowded. Thelma and Sally began to feel decidedly uncomfort-

able and insecure; they had not counted upon anything like this.

In peeping out through a small crack, Sally received a supreme shock when she recognized Lin in the audience. So this explained the Chinaman's absence from the Brandon household! He had affiliated himself with the strange activity which went on in Mr. Wing's establishment.

Presently, the master of the house entered the chapel and his arrival was the signal for a ceremony to begin. The room became so thick with incense that Sally was afraid she might choke or cough. The girls heard a weird chanting, not a word of which they could understand. Finally the ceremony ended and the Chinamen filed out of the room. As he passed through the doorway each man dropped money, gold or jewelry into a carved receptacle placed there to receive the offering.

Soon the chapel was deserted save for Mr. Wing and another Chinaman. The two then picked up the carved box, and carrying it between them, opened the secret panel which gave access to the adjoining room.

Sally and Thelma emerged from their hiding place in time to see the pair take the box into the chamber beyond the moon-gate portal.

"It looked to me as if Mr. Wing opened the door himself from the outside!" Sally whispered excitedly.

"Yes, it seemed as if he pressed a hidden spring,"

Thelma agreed. "I suppose you'll want to try that next!"

"Not while Mr. Wing is prowling around in there, thank you."

As the girls waited for the pair to reappear, they speculated upon what might be the purpose of the secret room. Thelma was inclined to think that it served as a treasure storehouse.

"Yes, but it has a more sinister purpose than that," Sally murmured. "I'd give a great deal to get inside the room."

After a few minutes Mr. Wing and his companion emerged through the moon-gate door which closed behind them. They were talking loudly in Chinese as they passed into the chapel and vanished down the corridor.

"Now is our chance!" whispered Sally.

Before Thelma could try to discourage her, she stepped boldly through the open panel and walked toward the moon-gate door.

"Sally, that guard may be watching us from the peephole!" Thelma warned nervously.

"I think he has gone away. The room probably is deserted."

"You're only hoping so," Thelma moaned. She did not want to follow Sally, yet she was equally afraid to remain behind.

Sally tiptoed to the moon-gate door, inspecting it as close range. She could see nothing to turn or press. Slowly she ran her hand over the section which Mr. Wing had appeared to touch.

"There must be a way to get in from this side," she insisted.

As Sally spoke her exploring fingers ran over a slightly raised spot in the circular panel. She pushed against it and the massive door slowly moved sideways.

"It's opening, Thelma!"

The girls poised themselves for instant flight should Sally's action have exposed them to any of Mr. Wing's men. They stared into a large room stored high with boxes and crates. The chamber appeared unguarded.

"Come on," Sally urged. "We'll learn Mr. Wing's secret!"

She stepped through the opening and Thelma reluctantly followed. As the door automatically closed behind them, they whirled about in dismay.

"Oh, we'll get out of here all right," Sally said carelessly to quiet her companion's fears. "The door should open easily from this side."

"It *should*," Thelma muttered, "but whether it will is another matter."

"Don't start worrying about that now," Sally commanded. "Let's find out what is inside these boxes."

The walls of the room were piled high with the

stout, wooden containers. Nearly all of them were nailed securely but the girls found a few which had not been fastened.

"Gunpowder!" Thelma exclaimed in awe. "There's enough of it here to blow up San Francisco!"

"And this box contains shells and guns!" Sally added. "Did you ever?"

"Why does Mr. Wing keep it hidden here?"

"Obviously, he intends to ship it to China aboard the *White Lady*. I never once thought of anything like this!"

"If Mr. Wing is trying to aid his country in time of war why doesn't he operate openly?"

"It must be that his purpose in shipping implements of warfare isn't a legitimate one. China is torn by internal strife, and it may be that Mr. Wing is trying to gain power by stirring up trouble in the interior. That's only my guess."

The girls looked into several boxes, all of which contained shells or guns. Then Sally came upon a carved chest.

"Here's something!" she exclaimed, stooping down to examine it.

"Is it locked?"

"Yes, but the key is here. Mr. Wing must have intended to come back in a few minutes."

"Hurry and open the chest," Thelma urged un-

easily. "Then we must get away from here or we'll be caught."

Sally lifted the lid and gasped with astonishment. Inside the chest were heap on heap of dazzling gems, sparkling diamonds, cleverly carved jades, pearl necklaces and a great mass of unset stones.

"Why, it's a treasure fit for a king!" Thelma murmured in awe.

Sally lifted out several of the necklaces and despite their need for haste the girls allowed themselves to become intoxicated by the sight of such riches.

"Some of these gems probably aren't very valuable," Sally said, "but others must be worth a small fortune!"

"How did Mr. Wing acquire such a treasure?"

"I have a pretty fair idea. He probably forced various Chinamen and their wives to donate the things. We saw what happened a few minutes ago in the chapel."

"And you believe this box of jewels is destined for China?"

"Either that or it will be used to purchase more guns and ammunition."

In examining the contents of the chest, Sally came upon a gold watch which looked strangely familiar.

"Lin had one very nearly like that," she told Thelma. "Father gave it to him three years ago for Christmas."

She picked it up and studied the case.

"It's Lin's watch all right," she announced grimly. "Wait until Father hears of this. Why, that watch was expensive and he's given it away!"

"Not because he wanted to, I imagine."

"No," Sally admitted, "Lin always prized that watch. I don't believe he'd give it away unless he was compelled to do so."

"How does Mr. Wing gain the right to force poor Chinamen to give up their cherished possessions?" Thelma demanded.

"From the appearance of some of these jewels, they didn't all come from poor Chinamen," Sally responded grimly. "Only a very wealthy woman could have owned a diamond necklace such as this."

She lifted up the string for Thelma to admire. The removal of the necklace had exposed a new layer of jewels in the chest. Sally gave a low cry as her gaze fell upon a particular stone.

"What have you found?" Thelma demanded, leaning closer.

With trembling fingers Sally reached into the chest and picked up a large green gem.

"Mr. Chan's emerald!" Thelma exclaimed.

"There could never be another stone like it," Sally declared. "This must be the stolen emerald."

In the thrill which came from making a series of important discoveries, the girls had forgotten how swiftly time was passing. The sight of the emerald

served to remind them of Mr. Wing and to awaken an old fear.

"Sally, we've been in this room ages," Thelma murmured.

"We'll get out of here right now. Let's take Lin's watch and the emerald."

Sally quickly tied the two articles in her handkerchief and closed down the lid of the chest. She would have forgotten to lock it had Thelma not reminded her.

"Li-la must have known what went on in this room even though she pretended she didn't," Thelma murmured as the girls moved hurriedly toward the moon-gate door. "Mr. Wing probably has been storing ammunition here for months."

"He's been forcing poor Chinamen to contribute to his cause," Sally added bitterly. "Not content with that he's even resorted to theft."

"Yes, it made no difference to him if he wrecked Mr. Chan. Very likely he has stolen from other rich Chinese too."

"I suspected from the first that Mr. Wing was involved in some underhanded business, but at last we have the proof! Our evidence should convict the man in any court."

"Let's go straight to the police, Sally."

"That's what I intend to do. If the officers work fast they'll be able to prevent the *White Lady* from sailing."

The girls had reached the circular portal. Thelma pushed upon the panel but it did not open. She remembered then how the door had closed automatically.

"Here, let me try," Sally said quickly.

Both girls made several attempts to force the door.

"It has a secret spring—we know that," Sally declared, refusing to give way to fear. "I'll find it in just a second."

She explored the circular panel but could locate no raised surface upon which to press. Thelma examined the remainder of the wall, going over every inch of it. They gave special attention to the sections directly behind the cherry blossom panels.

"There's no way to get out!" Thelma exclaimed. "We've trapped ourselves."

"No, we'll surely find the hidden spring in a minute or two," Sally said with forced cheerfulness. "Let's try to keep calm. We're in no great danger—yet."

"If Mr. Wing discovers us here—"

Sally's exploring fingers had touched a tiny, round object.

"Oh! I've found something! It seems to be a button in the wall."

"Thank goodness, we're saved," Thelma breathed in relief. "Hurry and open the door."

Their elation was of short duration. Sally pushed on the button, but the circular moon door did not move sideways as the girls expected. Instead, a tiny peep-

hole in the wall shot open. It was the same aperture through which they had seen the Chinese guard peer.

"Oh," Thelma wailed in disappointment. "That doesn't help us one bit."

"Don't give up the ship," Sally said encouragingly. "We'll find a way to get out of this cage. Just give me—"

Her words ended in a little gasp of horror. Through the peep-hole she had observed the approach of two men.

Thelma clutched her companion's arm.

"Someone is coming?" she demanded tensely.

Sally pressed the button which closed the peep-hole.

"It's Mr. Wing," she answered despairingly. "We are trapped, and there's no place to hide!"

CHAPTER XIX

PRISONERS

FRANTICALLY the girls glanced about the room. The only visible means of exit was through the moon-gate door and the walls were stacked high with boxes.

"We're lost!" Thelma moaned.

"Help me move out these boxes!" Sally commanded tersely. "We'll hide behind them!"

They shifted three of the boxes into a corner, and crouched down out of sight. The protection offered was slight and they held scant hope that Mr. Wing and his companion would fail to observe them.

Scarcely were the girls in their hiding place when the moon-gate door slowly opened to admit the two Chinese. They were conversing earnestly in their own tongue.

The pair seemed to be discussing the various stores in the room, for now and then Mr. Wing would tap one of the boxes as he slowly walked about with his companion. The other man made pencil notations in a small book which he carried. Sally decided that they were taking a final inventory of the goods to be shipped.

Mr. Wing paused before the chest of jewels. He opened the lid and glanced in, but apparently did not observe that the Ning-Wo emerald was missing. He carefully locked the container and thrust the key in an inner pocket of his silk robe.

Sally and Thelma began to breath a trifle easier. Then as Mr. Wing turned around, his gaze came to rest on the three boxes which the girls had rearranged. He stared for a moment and said something to his companion. The pair crossed the room and pulled one of the boxes aside, exposing Sally and Thelma.

"So!" The word escaped from Mr. Wing's lips more like a primitive expression of anger and outrage than a symbol of meaning.

He transfixed the girls with his glowering gaze and said bitterly:

"Your impudence would be entertaining if the occasion were more frivolous. Our young upstarts do not believe in warnings—that the lion's claws are sharp or the adder's sting brings death!"

Sally and Thelma were given no opportunity to reply. At a sharp command from Mr. Wing the other Chinese reached out and jerked the girls to their feet. Their struggles were brief and futile. They could not escape from the iron grip.

With no suggestion of haste, Mr. Wing bound their hands and feet together, and pasted tape over their

mouths. As a final affront, bandages were tied over their eyes.

"Like the three little monkeys who speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil, you will now preserve my secrets," Mr. Wing said coldly. "I trust you will not be uncomfortable."

The girls lay in a corner where the Chinamen had thrown them. Upon their ultimate fate they dared not speculate, but they knew Mr. Wing never would permit them to go free. In Sally's pocket, knotted in a handkerchief, reposed the Ning-Wo emerald. When the Chinamen discovered it was missing from the chest, their rage would vent itself anew upon the unfortunate victims.

The girls had been securely tied so that the stout thongs cut deeply into their tender flesh. Their discomfort steadily increased, yet they realized their pain was slight compared with the anguish which would come.

While Sally and Thelma could neither see nor speak, they were able to hear all that went on in the room. Mr. Wing and his companion went away for a few minutes. Then they returned with other Chinamen, and the girls became aware of heavy tramping about them. Boxes were pulled and scraped over the floor.

"The ammunition and guns are being moved," Sally thought. "Probably to the waiting boat."

She could not be certain, but she believed that the boxes were being taken from the storeroom by some means other than through the moon-gate door. If only she were able to see!

At Sally's side, Thelma gave a low moan of pain. Sally tried to roll slightly toward her only to receive a sharp kick in the ribs. After that she remained perfectly still.

For a half hour the commotion continued, but finally when the last box had been taken away, the room became silent again. Sally felt certain they were alone. She waited several minutes, then deliberately rolled over. Nothing happened. Mr. Wing and his men had gone.

Sally tried for awhile to loosen the thongs on her wrists. The task was a hopeless one for the Chinaman had tied the cords with clever knots. She could hear Thelma struggling beside her, but with bandages over their eyes it was impossible for them to aid each other.

"It's all my fault that we are in this dreadful situation," Sally thought self-accusingly. "Thelma had better sense than to come here, but I didn't. I dragged her into it."

A floor board creaked. Sally became very quiet, listening. She decided that someone had entered the room. Probably it was Mr. Wing.

Then suddenly Sally's heart leaped with hope as she

felt a hand touch her own. The next instant the bandage had been jerked from her eyes. She beheld Li-la Wing bending over her.

"I'll have you free in a moment," the Chinese girl whispered encouragingly.

The tape came off Sally's lips, taking some of the skin with it. She scarcely felt the pain.

"Oh, Li-la you saved us! Help Thelma—she's in worse condition than I."

"You have both been kind to me," Li-la answered as she worked swiftly. "I would be most ungrateful not to repay the debt even though you have been very reckless."

Sally's hands were free at last and she unbound her own ankles while Li-la turned her attention to Thelma.

"Your uncle did this to us," Sally said bitterly.

"You had no right to enter through the moon-gate door," Li-la answered coldly. "Many times you were warned to go away, but you would not obey."

She jerked the strip of tape from Thelma's mouth. The girl gave a sharp cry of pain.

"Hush!" Li-la commanded sternly. "Do you wish to bring my uncle again?" As she spoke she glanced fearfully over her shoulder.

"How did you find us?" Sally asked in a whisper as she helped to free Thelma's ankles.

"I knew that you were here, for I heard my uncle talking in the corridor with one of his men. They

plan to take you aboard the *White Lady* when the loading is finished."

"You mean we'd have been sent to China?" Thelma gasped.

"Yes, if you were fortunate enough not to fall overboard."

"We owe a great deal to you," Sally said, deeply moved. "You have saved us from a cruel fate."

"There is no time to waste in talk," Li-la answered. "My uncle may return at any moment. We must hurry."

Thelma and Sally turned toward the moon-gate door, curious to learn the secret which would cause it to open.

"No, we can't go that way," Li-la said quickly. "All of the doors of the house are guarded."

"Then how are we to escape?" Thelma questioned in dismay.

"We will go out through the tunnel."

Li-la threw back a richly colored Chinese rug which covered a section of the floor, exposing the outline of a trapdoor. There was no knob or ring, but when she pushed against it, the flooring sank down, disclosing a long flight of rickety wooden steps leading into a dark, damp hole.

"Isn't it possible to leave through the moon-gate door?" Thelma asked, shivering as a blast of musty air struck her.

"It is possible—yes, but fatal," Li-la answered impatiently. "The doors are all guarded."

"Then it's just as well Thelma and I couldn't find the hidden spring which opens the moon-gate," Sally declared. "We'd have been captured anyway."

"The door operates from inside with a lever secreted under the trap," Li-la disclosed. "See! I will show you."

As the three girls descended into the dark opening, she indicated an inconspicuous iron handle, warning Sally and Thelma that they were not to touch it. Built into the wall were several metal cases which contained machinery, used no doubt to move the heavy moon-gate door.

Li-la closed the trap above the girls' heads and immediately they were plunged into absolute darkness.

"Keep close to me and do not talk," Li-la commanded.

They went down a steep flight of stairs into a damp tunnel. Li-la walked rapidly and the girls were hard pressed to keep pace with her. Soon they came to another series of steps leading upward, but their guide continued along the passageway.

"Where do the stairs lead?" Sally whispered.

"To the beach."

Sally understood now what had happened to the boxes of ammunition. Mr. Wing's men had carried

them through the tunnel to the water's edge where small boats undoubtedly waited to transport them on to the *White Lady* anchored in deep water. At the present moment the vessel might be gathering steam for an earlier sailing than scheduled.

"We are now safe," Li-la said, slackening her pace. "My uncle is not likely to venture into this part of the tunnel."

"Where are you taking us?" Thelma asked dubiously.

"There is another exit which ends by the lake. We will find the bridge guarded."

"Then how are we to escape?" Thelma murmured despairingly.

"We shall not pass over the bridge, but under it."

"By means of a boat?" Sally asked anxiously. "Won't the guard see us?"

"He would if we attempted to use a boat. There is another way if you don't mind getting wet."

"Of course not," Sally said quickly. "I'd endure anything to get away from here."

"This tunnel is barred by a removable grating which opens directly beneath the bridge. Three feet under water a foot-bridge has been built, and one may cross in safety by using caution."

"A mis-step would prove disastrous," Thelma commented.

"Yes, the exit was meant for emergency use only—in the event that police tried to capture my uncle. It may be wiser for us to use the beach exit."

"But the boat is being loaded there," Sally said.

"Yes, we shall wait until the men have gone away."

"Oh, we can't do that!" Sally protested. "We must get out of here as quickly as we can. Show us the first exit, Li-la."

"So that you may go for the police?"

Too late Sally realized the folly of her words. She could not answer the question.

"You must remain here until after the *White Lady* has sailed," Li-la said evenly. "Not until then will I free you."

"Li-la, please listen to reason," Sally pleaded. "We must get out of here right away. You don't realize what your uncle is doing—"

"I know only too well," the Chinese girl responded bitterly. "He has one aim in life and that is to establish his power in China. To gain that end he sacrifices everything, even his own flesh and blood. He has made me into a cringing thief, a slave of his will!"

"You could be free if you chose, Li-la," Sally told her quietly.

"No, you do not understand. I thought once I could run away and live my own life, but it is not possible. My uncle would seek me out no matter where I might hide."

"The Law will take care of your uncle, Li-la," Thelma said.

"And it's long fingers would emmesh me also. My uncle would distort the part which I played in his affairs. He would talk."

"Li-la have you aided your uncle in any way except by stealing Mr. Chan's emerald?" Sally questioned.

"That is enough to send me to prison. I did not wish to take the gem, but my uncle forced me to do his bidding."

"And that is what you will tell the police officers," Sally said coaxingly. "I feel certain they will set you free."

Li-la shook her head. The arguments had made no impression upon her.

"We will wait here until the boat has sailed," she announced stubbornly.

"We don't wish to use force, Li-la," Sally said quietly, "but we are going to prevent the *White Lady* from leaving Moon-Gate point. Please step aside and allow us to pass."

"No!"

In the darkness Sally gripped Thelma's hand. It was a signal which the other girl understood. They must act together in an attempt to overpower Li-la. They had wasted many precious minutes in idle talk. Even now it might be too late for them to carry out their threat.

Only a feeling of gratitude toward Li-la caused Sally and Thelma to hesitate. They owed their escape if not their lives to her. They did not wish to mistreat her, yet there seemed no other way.

"Li-la, please consider—" Sally began, but the Chinese girl cut short the plea.

"No!" she repeated again. "You cannot move me."

Again Sally squeezed Thelma's hand, and they sprang forward, catching Li-la just below the knees. She went down in a heap, kicking and scratching. The struggle was a brief one for the Chinese girl was no match for her more athletic opponents.

"We didn't want to do this, but you insisted upon it," Sally apologized as she held Li-la while Thelma bound her arms with a dress sash.

"Shall we gag her?"

"No, I don't think it will be necessary," Sally decided. "If Li-la screams she'll draw her uncle here, and I doubt she will care to do that."

"You are quite right," Li-la answered calmly. "I promise I'll make no disturbance."

"Then we'll leave you with only your arms and legs tied," Sally said. "You needn't be afraid. We'll either come back for you ourselves or send help."

"You are most kind," Li-la replied, and there was a faint suggestion of laughter in her voice.

"What do you find so funny?" Thelma demanded suspiciously.

“I was just thinking you may have a difficult time in the tunnel,” Li-la replied, playing her trump card. “You see, I neglected to tell you how to open the iron grating!”

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIDGE OF ESCAPE

SALLY and Thelma had never thought of the possibility that without Li-la to guide them they still would be prisoners in the tunnel. With the girl's words, their plans crumbled.

"I guess you win after all," Thelma said hopelessly.

"Oh, Li-la, why did you have to be like this?" Sally cried despairingly. "Even if Mr. Wing is your uncle how can you protect him when he has robbed poor people and by your own admission has done many wicked things? It is in your power to halt his evil doings, but merely because you are afraid for yourself you decide against the right course."

"You mean—I am a coward?"

"Yes, Li-la, and if your father were here I'm sure he would tell you the same."

The Chinese girl did not reply. Sally had no idea that her words had made the slightest impression. Therefore she was astonished when Li-la said quietly:

"I lied to you. The grating is not locked. I said that only to keep you here. Go now before it is too late."

"Li-la!" Sally cried joyfully. "You *are* brave and generous!"

"Go or you will never be able to stop the *White Lady*. The hour approaches midnight."

"We'll set you free," Thelma declared. "You must come with us, Li-la."

"No, I cannot aid you in turning my uncle over to the police. Leave me as I am."

Minutes were precious and the girls did not stop to argue with Li-la. Promising that they would send someone for her as soon as they could, Sally and Thelma scurried down the dark tunnel.

Far ahead they could see a faint streak of light. Soon they came to a rusted iron grating which barred the exit. It did not budge when Sally pushed against it, but in another moment she had found the latch which held it fast. Cautiously the girls shoved open the grill and crept out into the foggy night.

They found themselves under the arching bridge as Li-la had told them they would be. To escape from the grounds they must cross the lake, mount the barrier and reach their car without being seen. While several boats were tied up alongshore, they dared not take one, for a Chinaman sat slumped by the bridge. He appeared to be sleeping but they knew that he would stir to life at the slightest sound.

"The water must be several times over our heads,"

Thelma whispered, shivering. She was a very poor swimmer.

There was no evidence of the foot-bridge which Li-la had mentioned. It required courage for Sally to step exploringly down into the icy waters. She thought she was going to plunge forward over her head, then her foot touched a solid base only a little way beneath the surface.

"Here it is," she whispered. "Follow close behind me, Thelma, and don't splash or it will mean our finish."

Feeling her way step by step, Sally crossed the lake with Thelma pressing directly in her wake. Once she found no solid footing ahead and had a moment of panic, fearing that the bridge had abruptly ended. It had only taken a curving turn to terminate not at a point opposite the iron grating, but farther down the shore.

When the girls finally emerged from the water they were beyond a bend in the lake, and no longer in view of the Chinaman guard.

"And now to find our car," Sally whispered. "I think it must be this way."

They struck off through the woods, and just as they had begun to fear that they had taken the wrong direction, came to the familiar fence. Climbing into the low-hanging branches of a tree they were able to swing down over the barrier.

"Safe!" Thelma breathed in relief.

They had moved only a few steps away from the fence when two men, suddenly emerging from the bushes at the side of the road, grasped them firmly by the arms.

"Let me go!" Sally cried, struggling violently. She twisted in the grasp of her captor so that she could see his face. He was not a Chinaman as she had expected.

"Oh, no, little lady," the man replied with a grim laugh. "Our orders are to arrest anyone caught trying to leave Moon-Gate estate."

"Your orders? Who posted you here?"

"A fellow by the name of Chan made a complaint to headquarters about this place. We're making a raid."

"Then you must be a plainclothesman!" Sally exclaimed.

"Right." The man pulled back his coat, disclosing a shiny badge.

"Oh, I'm so glad we ran into you," Sally began eagerly. "We were just going for the police."

"Sure, we know."

Sally poured forth her tale of what had occurred inside the walls of Moon-Gate estate. Suddenly she broke off as she realized that the two policemen did not believe a word of her story.

"Interesting yarn," one of them said carelessly. "Come along now and don't make any trouble."

"Oh, you must believe me!" Sally cried desperately. "Don't you understand—the vessel will be sailing in a few minutes, and it must be prevented!"

"Just give us a chance to prove our story," Thelma pleaded.

"You'll have your chance at the station," they were told.

Humiliated and silent, the girls were marched down the road toward the black police van which was waiting to receive all suspects rounded up at the estate. Already it was crowded with Chinese who chattered excitedly in their native tongue.

Nearby someone had parked a blue coupe, and a white-haired lady sat behind the wheel. She stared at the girls as they walked past. Then with a little cry she alighted and ran after them.

"Officer!"

The two plainclothesmen halted, and the girls glance back to see who had called.

"Mrs. Kellog!" Sally exclaimed, and could have wept for joy.

"Sally Brandon!" the missionary cried. "I received your message, but it was impossible for me to get here at the appointed hour. What has happened?"

"A great many things, but the latest is that my friend and I have been arrested by these officers. They refuse to believe our story about Mr. Wing."

"Release the girls immediately," Mrs. Kellog com-

manded sternly. "I can vouch for both of them. The idea of trying to arrest—"

"It was just a mistake," one of the men interposed hastily. "If you say they're okay Mrs. Kellog, that's good enough for us."

"Every word we told you about Mr. Wing was the truth," Sally said urgently. "Can't you do something before it is too late?"

This time the policemen were more than willing to listen. Sally and Thelma were taken to another officer who in turn gave curt orders to his men. A radio order was sent to headquarters asking for an extra squad of raiders, and Coast Guard authorities were notified to approach the *White Lady* from the water route.

"If Mr. Wing realizes a raid is in progress he'll try to hide in the tunnel," Sally told one of the officers anxiously. "His niece Li-la is there too. If it hadn't been for her we'd never have managed to escape."

"Don't worry, we'll get them both."

"Li-la must be treated well," Sally urged. "She should prove a star witness against the conspirators."

The girls wished to accompany the raiders into the estate, but they were not permitted to enter the grounds. For more than a half hour they waited with Mrs. Kellog in the coupe. During that time they heard two or three shots.

"Oh, I wish we knew what had happened," Sally said nervously.

"We'll learn in good time," Mrs. Kellog replied calmly.

"Look!" Thelma cried, pointing toward the big iron gate. "Someone is trying to escape."

"It may be Mr. Wing!" Sally exclaimed.

Mrs. Kellog and the girls sprang from the car. They were too far away to prevent the man from making his escape. He fled in the opposite direction, but not before Sally had caught a glimpse of his face in the bright beam of the automobile headlights.

"That was Lin!" she declared. "I'm certain of it."

Before the others could comment, a tumult was heard within the walls of Moon-Gate estate, and very soon a number of Chinamen were marched through the exit to the already crowded van. Mr. Wing was handcuffed to one of the officers, and the girls learned that he had been captured only after a desperate struggle.

"Where is Li-la?" Sally murmured anxiously.

They saw her in the custody of an officer, and hastened over to say a comforting word.

"Don't worry about anything, Li-la," Thelma said kindly. "You'll have to go to the station with the others, but we'll try to secure your release. Mrs. Kellog says she'll help too, and she has great influence with the police."

Li-la smiled, but made no reply. She was taken to

the police station in one of the automobiles while her less favored companions made the trip in the crowded wagon.

"We've rounded up about twenty Chinamen in all," an officer reported to Sally. "Most of them will receive light sentences or be let off. Wing appears to be the brains of the conspiracy."

"I hope Jake Hammil didn't get away."

"He's in custody of the Coast Guard officers—captured aboard his vessel. You've done good work, Miss, and unless I'm wrong, the Chief will want to thank you personally."

It was very late when Sally and Thelma bade Miss Kellog goodbye and drove back to the Brandon home. As the car swept up the driveway they were astonished to see persons moving about in the brightly lighted living room.

Before Sally could open the door, her father and mother came outside.

"Oh, I had no idea you'd get back tonight!" Sally exclaimed.

"We arrived only ten minutes ago," Mrs. Brandon explained. "We found Aunt Jessie so much improved that it did not seem necessary to remain. The truth is we were worried about you, Sally, so we decided to drive back tonight. Where *have* you been?"

"It's a long story," Sally sighed, "but first, before

I try to tell you about everything, I want to find out what has become of Lin. Explanations should start with him."

Mr. and Mrs. Brandon followed the girls upstairs to the room occupied by the Chinese servant. When Sally rapped on the door there was no response. She pushed it open expecting to find that Lin had fled. Instead he was sleeping peacefully in his bed.

For just an instant Sally was bewildered. Had she been mistaken in thinking that the fleeing figure was Lin? Then she noticed the sole of a shoe protruding from the edge of the bed blankets.

"Lin, you old pretender!" she cried, and jerked off the covers, exposing the Chinaman fully dressed in street clothes.

Lin seated himself on the edge of the bed, eyeing the intruders as if he considered that they were violating his rights to privacy.

"What China boy servant do in own room," he said very deliberately, "is own business, maybe."

"This happens also to be the business of the police," Sally replied.

At mention of the law, Lin quailed perceptibly.

"Me not know about police. Me velly good citizen."

"You seemed to know a great deal about the police tonight," Sally said significantly. "At any rate, you eluded them at Moon-Gate estate for I saw you run away. We are good citizens too, Lin, and it will be

our duty to turn you over to the authorities as a fugitive from justice."

"Oh, no Missee!" A faint note of alarm had crept into Lin's voice. Sally knew that he was genuinely alarmed.

"Then tell us everything about the theft of Mr. Chan's emerald," the girl commanded.

Lin hesitated as if giving the matter calm consideration, and then embarked upon his narrative:

"Mr. Wing is head man of secret organization. If small China boy say 'no' to Mr. Wing much bad luck happen fast. Lin do everything because Mr. Wing say so."

"I understand," Sally nodded assuringly, "you were merely a cat's paw for Mr. Wing. Now tell us how the emerald was stolen."

"Missee and other Missee go to auction. Meet girl Li-la who go there for her uncle. Mr. Wing wish her to snoop on Honorable Mr. Chan shop. Missee make error and tell Li-la about hiding place of emerald."

"Yes, that was a grave mistake on my part," Sally admitted. "Then what happened, Lin?"

"Li-la cat-foot into Mr. Chan's room and hide emerald in dress goods. When Li-la see search boys come she velly much frightened inside. She drop Buddha in junk box Missee buy."

"Well, that checks exactly with what Thelma and

I thought," Sally said, almost beside herself with interest in the servant's revelation. "Go on with your story, Lin."

"Li-la tell Mr. Wing. He send strong-boys to make big high-jack."

"And he nearly succeeded," Thelma remarked, remembering how their car had been pressed to the curb by another automobile.

"When junk box come here, Mr. Wing phone me what to do. He say keep hawk-eye lookout. Missee leave room to answer phone call. When Miss come back she find Buddha gone."

"And you stole it almost under my eyes!" Sally exclaimed. "From the very first we were afraid you were the guilty person."

"Me only take Buddha because Mr. Wing command. Mr. Wing is velly wicked."

"If you did all these things unwilling why were you at Moon-Gate estate tonight helping to load the boat?" Sally pursued.

"Mr. Wing say so! When Lin refuse Mr. Wing send strong boys."

"You remember I told you that I saw Lin go away with several Chinamen," Thelma reminded Sally. "It's true he didn't seem very willing."

"Me velly solly do crimes for Mr. Wing," Lin said contritely. "Now me go with you to police. Spend life in jail-house."

"Perhaps that won't be necessary," Sally said, smiling despite herself. "After I've told Mother and Father everything they shall make the decision. Now go back to bed, only this time take off your shoes!"

In the living room once more, Mr. and Mrs. Brandon received a complete account from the girls of all that had occurred during the evening.

"Lin did very wrong to take the emerald," Mr. Brandon said thoughtfully, "but from what you tell me, Sally, it's apparent that many Chinamen fell prey to Mr. Wing's craving for power. Lin was not really to blame for the part he played."

"That's the way I feel about it," Sally murmured in relief. "I wish we could arrange to keep Lin with us."

"If Li-la gives a complete story to the police, his testimony will not be required to convict Mr. Wing. I believe the best thing to do will be to forget the matter."

Lin was overjoyed to learn that he would be allowed to remain in the Brandon household. He labored as he never had before, and wherever Sally went his worshipful eyes followed her.

The girls were deeply troubled for Li-la, fearing that she might not escape a prison sentence. However, when the Chinese girl told the police a straight-forward story which tallied exactly with Lin's, it was clear that her only wrong act had been the theft of the

Ning-Wo emerald. Should Mr. Chan refuse to prefer charges against her she would be allowed to go free.

Under police escort, Sally and Thelma carried the precious emerald to Mr. Chan's shop where they were ceremoniously received by the elderly merchant. His appreciation was expressed in tangible form, for after telling the girls that they had saved him from financial ruin, he bestowed upon each a beautiful and costly jade pendant.

"I should like to ask one favor," Sally requested timidly.

"My mood is such that I will grant you anything," Mr. Chan said with a bow.

"Mr. Wing wronged you deeply, but Li-la was an unwilling pawn. She stole the emerald only because she was forced to obey her uncle's command. Please permit her to go free. I am positive you will never regret it."

Mr. Chan looked troubled. "I have given my promise," he said reluctantly. "It shall be as you request."

Confident that it would only be a matter of days until Li-la was released by the police, Sally sought Mrs. Kellog's aid in finding a suitable home for the Chinese girl. Their investigation disclosed that Li-la was entitled to a fairly large income left by her late father, a sum sufficient to provide comfortable living and an excellent school. It was arranged that she

should remain at the Mission for a time, and then take up her studies.

As Sally and Thelma confidently hoped, both Mr. Wing and Jake Hammil were given long prison terms. Li-la served as a witness against them, receiving in return her own freedom.

Upon the day of the girl's release from jail, Sally and Thelma were at hand to drive her to the Mission. They were well pleased because Li-la did not blame them for the fate of her uncle. She felt only gratitude toward them because they had saved her from an unhappy life.

As for Lin, his appreciation reached its final peak several days later in the form of a magnificent cake upon which he spent the best part of the day. He labored over the decorations with infinite pains for it was an art in which he took great pride.

When the offering was set on the dinner table, Sally was astonished to see that it was a remarkable likeness of the Moon-Gate door, done in many-colored frostings.

"Why, Lin," she said admiringly. "I never suspected you could create anything as fine as that."

Lin's face lighted up with his inscrutable smile.

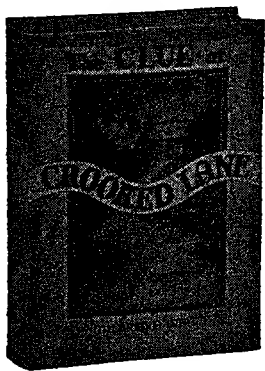
"Me make velly nice souvenir!" he observed proudly.

"Indeed you did," Sally agreed. "It's almost too nice to eat."

"Don't feel that way," said Thelma, who hovered

near. "This is one time when you can eat your cake and have it too."

And Sally knew that her chum was right. For she would remember always the moon-gate door and all that had happened behind its mysterious portals.



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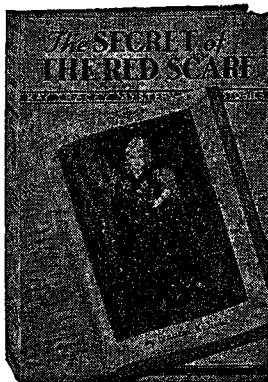
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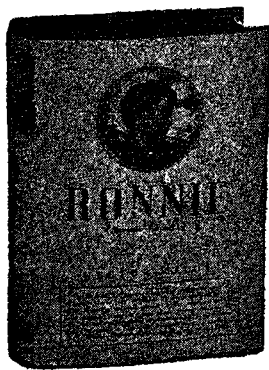
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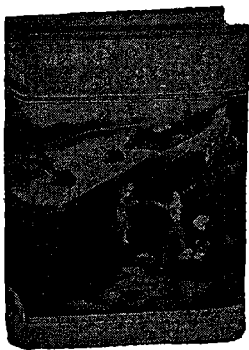
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